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PHIL FOGLIO
MUMBLES ABOUT MYTH-ADVENTURES!

ECLIPSE COMICS EDITOR
CAT YRONWODE
A CONTROVERSIAL CONVERSATION FROM "FINE" ART TO NOT-SO-FINE COMICS!

#23

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S COMICS INTERVIEW

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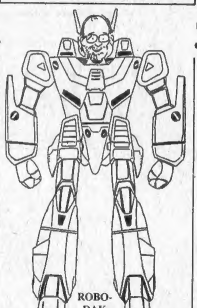

ROBO-DAK

UP FRONT

The inveterate credits-watchers among you have already noticed the addition of another West Coast Correspondent in the column to the left of this editorial. The name is new to COMICS INTERVIEW — but not to comics: **Shel Dorf.**

Shel will be contributing all kinds of interviews from California with a genuine cross section, a true variety, of cartoonists and creators in all walks of comics life. The first of his efforts here — a conversation with **Rick Hoberg** — appeared in issue #21, and his dialogue with **Carl Macek** is a high point of the issue you hold in hand.

Shel really needs no introduction — he's an active presence in the comics field. From its start until only recently he helmed the San Diego Comic Convention, he was founding editor of **Milton Caniff**'s STEVE CANYON magazine for Kitchen Sink, and he continues as letterer of the current syndicated strip. Shel's knowledge of the history of comics is considerable, and his most recent activities include writing, editing and producing a series of comic-strip reprint books for Blackthorne.

And, of course, contributing to COMICS INTERVIEW.

In fact, Shel is, himself, ripe for the interviewing — so besides the conversations with various comics creators he'll be conducting for us, I've also arranged for an interview in the months to come with the man behind the microphone. I'm sure Shel has many stories to tell!

COMICS INTERVIEW is all the richer for his contributions. Keep 'em coming, Shel!

-Dave

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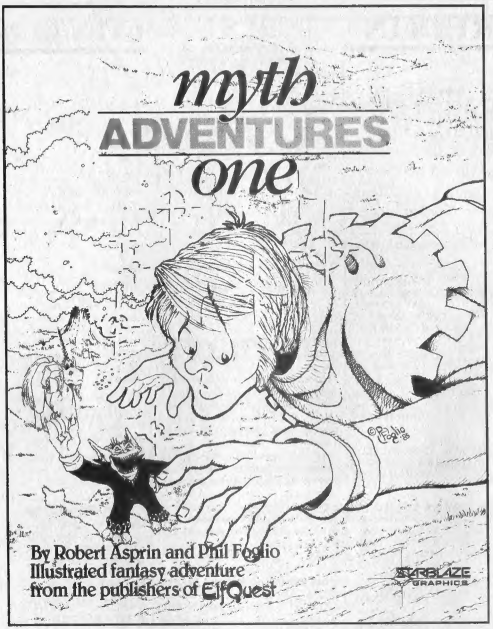

Life getting you down?

Come fly with us. Look for Myth Adventures, the graphic novel, in color September 85 from Starblaze Graphics.

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"MYTH-ADVENTURES is gonna be *big stuff.*"

Photo: Pat O'Neill

PHIL FOGLIO

The Foglio studio is a large, airy room in Phil's large, airy apartment in Brooklyn's Flatbush section, which he shares with film/video artist Cecilia Cosentini. Phil's public style is effusive; he exudes confidence; and he's not afraid to act out a story. That being the case, it's not surprising to discover that one of his outside interests is performing — he has formed, along with four other science-fiction and comics fans, the Zanti Misfits, a comedy troupe currently making convention appearances. Though he's now a professional, fandom is very much a part of Phil's life, so it seemed natural to start the conversation at the high points of his fannish career . . .

PAT O'NEILL: *I understand you believe you were once cheated out of a Hugo Award?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Phil Foglio
Born: I May 1956 — Mt. Vernon, NY
Residence: Brooklyn, NY
Educated: Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, BFA 1978 (other graduates include Milton Caniff)
First Published Work: ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, 1978
Proudest Accomplishments: Thanks to art, I've never had to hold down a real job for more than a month at a time.
Most Embarrassing Accomplishment: Cartoons published in SWANK

PHIL FOGLIO: Not cheated exactly. I was nominated in 1976 in two categories — best fan artist and best dramatic presentations for THE CAPTURE, a slide show I did with **Bob Asprin**. Bob wrote it, I drew it, in a week. We lost out to the film version of **Harlan Ellison**'s A BOY AND HIS DOG. We have since determined, through various people, that there was a gross mistake, and we should have won.

No joke, no joke. According to a friend who worked for a bookstore up in Canada, they had a deal where if you joined the WorldCon and filled out your Hugo ballot, they'd mail it for you. While the owner was doing it, before he mailed them all in, he went through the ballots to see how his customers were voting, which made sense. He said THE CAPTURE had close to 500 votes in his stack, alone. A BOY AND HIS DOG won on less than 500. But the WorldCon that year, MidAmeriCon, was notorious for

WRITER/ARTIST

"I change quite a lot... I know what

BUT THIS TIME - THIS TIME THE OLD FROG KISSER'S GONE TOO FAR.
DON'T YOU AGREE?
YOU STILL HAVEN'T TOLD ME WHAT'S WRONG.
WHAT'S WRONG IS THAT STINKING SLIME MONGER TOOK AWAY MY POWERS!
I CAN'T DO A FLAMING THING UNLESS HE REMOVES HIS STUPID PRANKISH SPELL AND HE CAN'T 'CAUSE HE'S DEAD!
WELL, IF THERE WAS ANYTHING I COULD DO...
1985 WaRP, Foglio, Asprin

Aahz gives Skeeve the soft sell--from MYTH-ADVENTURES #1.

losing a lot of mail. *(In a high-pitched voice:)* But am I bitter? Nooooooo.

PAT: *After all, you won one later on...*

PHIL: Right. The next year, 1977, Best Fan Artist. I was up against **Tim Kirk**, who had dominated the field for the last five years. I was 21 when I won, which made me the youngest person to ever win a **Hugo**, a record which still stands. In 1978, I won again for Best Fan Artist, and at that point, I removed my name from consideration in that category — which prompted a wave of the same thing. **Rick Sternbach** did the same thing, and so did **Charlie Brown**, publisher of LOCUS, the SF news magazine. That lasted until Chuck managed to get out of the auditorium and say, "I was drugged or stupid — I didn't mean it! Jesus!" And LOCUS has continued to rack them up, with blithe disregard of whether it's a fanzine or not. "Hi, Chuck!"

PAT: *And that presentation, THE CAPTURE, led, somewhat circuitously, to what you're doing now — MYTH-ADVENTURES.*

PHIL: Around the end of 1981, beginning of '82, the then-editor of Donning/Starblaze, **Hank Stine**, had seen my stuff and said, "Hey, we want you to illo these books that **Bob Asprin** is doing for us." I don't know whether **Bob** suggested me or not, though that's not impossible. It just worked so well together that there's never been any suggestion of stopping. And when Hank left and **Kay Reynolds** took over, the working relationship became a lot more interlocking, and that's why I'm doing so many things for them now.

PAT: *When did the idea of doing it as a comic book pop up?*

PHIL: I'm not sure when the idea first manifested itself, because it was something Bob and **Richard Pini** cooked up. They came to me and said, "How'd you like to do the art?" That was around the end of '83. I thought about it and said, "Nope, can't do it." And they said, "Whaddaya mean, you can't do it? This is WaRP Graphics, this is MYTH-ADVENTURES, this is gonna be *big stuff*!" And I told them I just didn't have the time to pencil and ink a whole book.

PAT: *After all, at that time you still thought you were going to be doing D'ARC TANGENT, right?*

PHIL: Among other things. I just couldn't afford the time to do both books. "Well, how about if we get somebody else to ink you?" And I said, "That sounds interesting."

Then began a great little lobster quadrille, as they took submissions. Richard immediately spoke up for this great guy he knew, but I said I'd like to throw it open. We sent out sample pencils to a bunch of people — one of whom was **Freff**, incidentally. **Tim Sale** won, hands down.

PAT: *Richard's choice?*

PHIL: Yeah, but he really was the best of the samples, by a wide margin. I said, "Great, let me meet Tim, talk to him..."

"Well, that's kind of tough..." Richard replied.

"Why?"

"He lives in Seattle."

"Washington? Okay, I can't meet him. What's he done?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"Can I see some of his stuff?"

"We don't have any here, but we've seen it — and it's great!"

"But I'm going to pencil an entire book and then just shove it out into the void, and not know what's going to happen?"

"Yup, yup, yup..."

"Oh, great..."

Well, I did it. We talked about all kinds of things — like having Tim ink the first issue entirely on tissue overlays, so in case it turned out terrible, we could do something with it. But finally, I said, "Fuck, it's only a book, send it out..."

It came back and it looked pretty good. I was real pleased. Then Richard said, "We're gonna premiere the book at NorwesCon, 1984."

I said, "NorwesCon. Where's that?"

"Seattle. So Tim will be able to get there."

"That's terrific. And of course, you're paying for me to get out there, too."

"Well, no, but we'd really like it if you were there."

I said, "Oh, terrific. Well, okay. But the book will definitely be there?"

"Oh yeah, we're taking it to the printers Tuesday."

"Wait a minute. Rich, Rich — you're taking the book in Tuesday, and Friday, we're going to premiere it in Seattle?"

"Yeah."

"Well, that doesn't leave a whole hell of a lot of time for somebody doing something like fucking up the press or something, does it?"

"No, but these are really good people. Don't worry about it."

"When are you going to pick the book up?"

"Friday morning, on my way to the airport."

"RICH! Your confidence is awe-inspiring!"

"Don't worry about it!"

So, true to all publishing form, the book runs into some production delays, and Rich gets it to the printer not Tuesday, but Wed-

Bob's written and I know I don't like it."

nesday. "Rich, my flight leaves Wednesday night..."

"Yeah, it'll be a real shame if the book ain't there."

"RICH! I'm taking out a mortgage to afford this damn plane ticket, and you're telling me the book might not be there?"

"You gotta have faith, Phil..."

We got there. Rich's plane theoretically got in at nine p.m. Well, he's not there at nine, he's not there at ten. I'm sitting in the hotel lobby. He's not there at eleven — I'm now camped in the hotel lobby. At 1:30 a.m., Bob is sitting with me, our eyes are like two fried eggs afraid to blink. Rich rumbles in and says, "Hi, guys! What are you doing here? What's the big problem?"

"Rich, you're here, thank God! Did you bring the book?"

"The book? Oh, the book! Yeah." And he holds up a box. We wheel his stuff to his room, and goes in and says, "Well, see you guys in the morning."

Bob and I just look at each other. "He's fuckin' joking, isn't he?"

So we broke down the door — "If you don't give us a copy of the book, **Pini**, we're going to kill you!"

PAT: *So what are you up to now?*

PHIL: I am working on issue #6 right now. The big changes: recently I had to go from 26 to 32 pages on the book, because they were cutting some of the flim-flam in the back. Then, when **Mike Catron** joined WaRP, he said, "Hey, back-up features sell books!" So now they want me to cut back to 20 pages. They are also interested in me doing the back-up.

PAT: *Which basically means you're going to be back to doing 26 pages...*

PHIL: Which is somewhat of a problem. The MYTH-ADVENTURE books are relatively easy to do, because I've got that skeleton of Bob's to build upon, whereas the back-up feature I'll have to write myself.

PAT: *Do you have any idea what the back-up will be?*

PHIL: Yes, I do. For the 1982 Chicago WorldCon bid, I created a character called Roger Parks, a time-traveling investigator. His tagline was "For a fee, I'll go back in time and find out if something happened. For more, I'll make it happen." And that's his main business — most people pay the larger fee. He goes back and alters history.

PAT: *In what issue will we see the ROGER PARKS feature begin?*

PHIL: Hard to say. When I started MYTH-ADVENTURES, I was counting on 26, 28 pages each issue to tell the story. Getting cut back to 20... if they'd said, "This issue, #6, cut back to 20," I couldn't do it. I'm filling this book easily. Originally, we were supposed to go six issues to adapt ANOTHER FINE MYTH, but I got into it, and after issue #2, I said, "I've gotta have eight issues for it. I can't do it any other way." And they said, "Okay, fine!" I really had to twist their arms. "I must do more books!" "Okay" — they collapsed like a house of cards.

PAT: *So you really can't say when ROGER PARKS will start, except that it's some time after issue #6?*

PHIL: It might be issue #7, 'cause Lord knows, that's probably going to be the sparsest issue. I have no idea what's going to be in issue #7 or #8... I write these things as I go along...

PAT: *...just using Bob's basic plotline from the book?*

PHIL: Well... no, no. I change the books quite a lot — more and more as the series progresses. It's kind of cumulative. When I say I don't know what's going to happen I know what Bob's written and I know I don't like it, and I know changes I've made earlier. As I'm laying out the book, that's when it all comes together, and I say, "Well, Skeeve did this in issue #4, and the end result of that is they all get turned into daffodils! Hmmm... how do I write them out of this one?"

PAT: *Have you gotten any reaction from Bob about changing his plots — his name is still on the book?*

PHIL: Yes. As a matter of fact. The big change came in issue #3. He called up Richard and said, "Are you aware of how much work Phil is doing on the writing?" Theoretically, Bob was supposed to give me a breakdown of each issue — how much of the book would be covered and what would happen on each page. Then I'd do a visual breakdown and submit the script to Bob for suggestions and changes and then I'd finish it up. The way it was working, Bob would give me his outline, I'd draw up the breakdowns and finishes, submit them to Richard, and the first time Bob would see them is when he saw the finished book. Admittedly, I wasn't working until I had to, and to meet our schedules I was eliminating the "show Bob" stage. So Bob said, "I want Phil to get more money." He took a cut in his percentage.

PAT: *But has he objected to any of the changes you've made?*

WHY - WE'LL BE FAMOUS FOR THIS! LIKE NAPOLEON AT WATERLOO - CUSTER AT THE LITTLE BIG HORN - THE LIGHT BRIGADE AT BALACLAVA...
GEE, AAHZ - YOU REALLY THINK SO?
KID - WHY WOULD I LIE TO YOU?
GROGH

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NO TIME FOR SPACE ARK!

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SPACE ARK
NO TIME FOR SPACE ARK!
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A SDEAL AT ODLY $1.75 EACH. BUD WAID DERES BORE! HOW ABOUD DIS DIFTY JAR OSENOR AD BARFING DIFES, HOW BUCH WOULD YOU PAY? WHY, WE'LL EBON TROW ID TWO SLUB WIDMAN ALBUMS AD BIB BICKTORY'S BRA SIZE!! OOW HOW BUCH WOULD YOU SAY? SUBBLIES ARE RIBBITED, SO ORDER BEFORE BIDNIGHT DONIGHT!

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SEE – *THE SPACE ARK CAREEN WILDLY THROUGH SPACE WITHOUT ANY IDEA WHERE THEY ARE GOING!*

STORY BY
KEN MITCHRONEY
MARK CANTRELL

ART BY
KEN MITCHRONEY

"Bob'll discuss *l'aissez faire*. That's bullshit in a comic. You don't need it."

PHIL: None at all. Admittedly, some of the biggest ones happen in issue #5 and issue #6, which I'm working on. But all of the little minor ones that I've made so far, he's said nothing. I get the feeling he's quite interested in what's happening. Pretty much he doesn't say anything. Sometimes I'll get a phone call at eleven o'clock at night. I'll pick it up and hear, "Lord Aahz? When did he become Lord Aahz? *Click.*"

PAT: *So the rough adaptation of the first novel will end with #8. What about #9?*

PHIL: First of all, starting with #8, we'll go bi-monthly. Richard asked me, "How long does it take you to do an issue?" It takes me about a week, more or less. Two, if I include the writing. Tim inks about a page a day.

PAT: *So if you figure ten days for you, 26 for Tim, that's only 36 days — plenty of time for a bi-monthly schedule.*

PHIL: After issue #8, the plan is to do an original story for the comic, which would run four issues. I don't know anything about that yet, as to who is writing it. I am working on an idea, and I'll be talking it over with Rich and Bob. It will cover what I always saw as a terrible logic jump in the first two books. What I'm hoping for is a story set in Aahz's home dimension of Perve, with him going back and taking care of his business affairs before taking off for awhile. There must have been something he should be taking care of all this time.

In HIT OR MYTH, Bob has one of Aahz's nephews show up, because the family business is going to hell in a handbasket, but that's years later in the timeframe of the books. So I figured he'd set something up.

PAT: *Can you quickly go over your working method on an issue of MYTH-ADVENTURES?*

PHIL: The very first thing I do: I get ANOTHER FINE MYTH, and I read through the section we're going to cover that issue. This usually takes 15 minutes. I then beat my head on my board and run around the apartment, yelling, "Geez, what am I gonna do?" Then, I break it down into rough pages. "Page 17: Skeeve walks by the window, and Aahz buys a hat. Page 18: The hat eats his head."

Then I do rough layouts on typing paper, thumbnails, and script it out, trying to get an idea of pacing. It's at this point that the largest number of changes from the book happen because Bob'll have the characters in a two-page discussion of *l'aissez faire* government or something while riding through the forest. I'll just put in "Ride through forest." The rest is bullshit in a comic book. You don't need it.

Then I start pencilling, and when I've finished the pencils, I borrow a friend's typewriter and type up the script. As I'm typing, I look at my notes, I look at the pencilled page, and figure out exactly what's being said. This is when the script if finalized.

The script and pencils go off to Richard, who edits the script, checks spelling errors, and makes sure I haven't put any weird stuff in the backgrounds. I had a good one last time. He was looking over the pages in my studio, I was getting dinner ready, and I heard this scream. I tried to remember what scene he was up to in the book, "He was up to about page 8. Oh, yeah . . ."

Left: Roughs from page 12 of MYTH-ADVENTURES #4. Right: Finished art.

SUNSET?! You're sure that's all already left the queen with?
Who? I see what a little compulsion for your trouble!
I wonder what they do to display bodies around here?
Who isn't on offering
GOOD LORD, HIM!
WELL, I'LL BE DAMNED! IT'S ALIVE! IT'S ALIVE!
SO HIM, TOO. WHAT'S HE DOING HERE? DO THEY?
SLEEP?! THEY WHAT?! READY OR NOT, HERE THEY COME!
HMMM... WELL, IT'S A NO. SAY, WOULD YOU DO MY PAINTING HALL?
OH, HE'S SURE WELL HUNG. IT STILL DOESN'T MAKE UP FOR TELLING ME I WELL!
WELL, TOO BAD TO TOUCH THE SKY WITH IT.
TO THE PIT WITH YOU AND YOUR MEDIOCRE WORK! YOU'RE ONE LOUSY PAINTER!
I'M SORRY, BUT I'M NOT GOING TO TOUCH THAT. I'M NOT GOING TO TOUCH ANYTHING!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TOUCH IT? IT'S RIGHT UP THERE!
LEAVE IT TO A TROLL WHO WOULD CALL HIS CHILD "IT"!
WHO, ME?
I REMEMBER WHEN WE USED TO BURN BODIES AT THE STAKE!

1985 Martin Foglio, Aspen

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Ron

"Richard was about to have brain embolisms."

Richard came storming in. I had a character in a jacket, and on the back it said, "This space for rent." with a phone number — WaRP Graphics' phone number! And Richard was about to have brain embolisms over the thought of his phone number appearing in the magazine. Richard now studies my book very carefully.

PAT: *I seem to remember seeing some people who looked remarkably like Cutter from ELFQUEST. . .*

PHIL: Yeah, there are some things he just throws his hands up over. Actually, the first Cutter he didn't catch. Richard is just getting used to the fact that I put so much stuff in.

PAT: *After Richard edits and makes sure WaRP's phone number, or anything else libelous or whatever, isn't in the book. . .*

PHIL: Then Richard sends it off to Tim, who does the lettering and inking. He sends it back to me for the occasional ink touch-ups, and I put on the screens — Zip-A-Tone or whatever.

PAT: *That's unusual. Usually, it's the inker who does the screen work. Why did you decide to do it this way?*

PHIL: I use screens more than most people do. Tim hardly uses . . . I don't think Tim uses screens at all. I don't think he knows that much about them. Then it goes to the printer. When the printer returns the pages, I strip off all the tone screens — I leave the texture screens on — and send it down to Starblaze to be set up for the eventual color version.

PAT: *The other major thing you have going is the possibility of a series of graphic novels. . .*

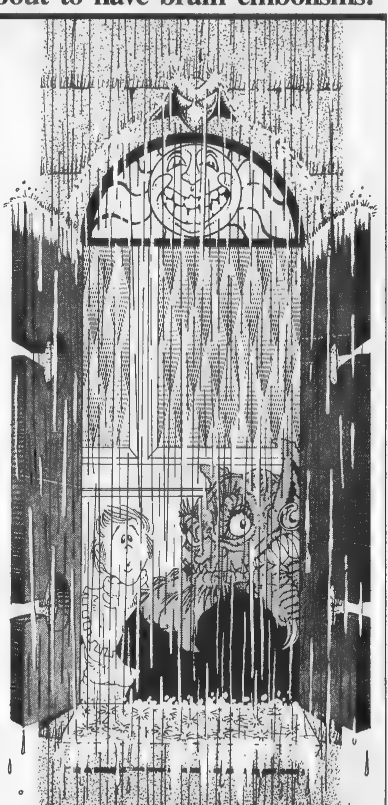
PHIL: . . . from Starblaze. . .

PAT: *. . . involving a character called Buck Godot. How about an explanation for those who've never seen what limited printing of BUCK GODOT there has been?*

PHIL: BUCK GODOT is based on a friend of mine named **John J. Buckley, Jr.**, who lives back in Chicago. Buck is an interstellar gun-for-hire. People hire him as a bodyguard, to retrieve things; he's not really even a detective. I've heard people call him that, but he never really does any deduction — he's not that organized. He appeared in a comic book published out of Chicago by a guy named **Dennis Meisinger**, who is currently working for Glenwood Distributors, called JUST IMAGINE. JUST IMAGINE had a print run of 1500 copies, so if you have one, it's probably worth something just as a curiosity item alone. It's still publishing, I think. . .

PAT: *Yeah. I saw an issue at Forbidden Planet just a week ago. It looked relatively recent — #12 or something.*

PHIL: Yeah. Denny is thinking of giving



1985 Foglio, Adzima

"Archie Goodwin said 'This figure is

WELL, BUCK- HERE WE ARE- ALL ALONE. ISN'T IT ROMANTIC? WHY I'M TINGLING ALL OVER JUST THINKING ABOUT IT.
SO DON'T THINK.
YOU'LL TINGLE LESS.
AW BUCK- WE'VE BEEN ALONE NOW FOR ALMOST AN HOUR! I'VE NEVER BEEN ALONE WITH A MAN FOR AN HOUR AND NOT HAVE HIM AT LEAST ... KISS ME.
MY LIPS ARE ON DUTY

Above and below: BUCK GODOT. Soon to be a Starblaze series.

it up. I originally had all these wonderfully sophisticated and erudite stories and nobody was buying them — nobody was even interested in them. I was inspired by **Rich Larson**'s "Space Beagles" in the book NO DUCKS. So I said, "Terrific! I'll do a story in which there is a fight or an explosion on every page!" I came up with a nice little six-page, mindless strip, which was immediately turned down by Epic. **Archie Goodwin** looked at one panel and said, "This figure back here is poorly drawn... so we're not going to publish this," and gave me a free issue which contained a story that took four pages to show a woman turning into a crow. At that point, I said, "Okay — so much for EPIC." But JUST IMAGINE already existed, and they saw the story, and said, "We'll take it." And it became very popular among JI's limited readership.

I did three other stories for them, and then

Starblaze, the people who publish the color volumes of ELFQUEST...

PAT: *...and the Bob Asprin MYTH novels...*

PHIL: ...said, "Well, gee whiz, why don't you do a BUCK GODOT graphic novel for us?" So I did a brand new story about 36 pages long, and we put it all together with the previously published strips — so it's about 60 pages — and I sent it off to them, and they said, "Gee, the ELFQUEST books are doing so well, we have to take out a bank loan to pay the Pinis their royalties..." they really wanted to get into graphic novels because it was doing terrifically for them. As a result, they'll now be publishing a graphic version of **Bob Asprin**'s THIEVES' WORLD — that's being done by **Tim Sale**, the guy who inks MYTH-ADVENTURES. I don't know what else they're working on — they were talking about D'ARC TANGENT for a while; we all had a good laugh about that.

But they liked BUCK GODOT, although they're going to sit on the book until next year, and release it then, and hopefully, by that time, I will be able to have two or three in the pipeline, and these things will start coming out once every couple of months. They'll be 48 pages long, and single stories, like the VALERIAN books from...

PAT: *...Dargaud.*

PHIL: So, the only thing that annoys me about it is that they're sitting on it 'til next year. I think my artwork improves sufficiently quickly that, by the time it comes out, I'm going to be incredibly embarrassed by some of those early stories.

PAT: *You've mentioned D'ARC TANGENT several times now. I suppose we ought to at least explain a little of what happened to that project. That was based on ideas you had come up with as a fan...?*

PHIL: In 1977, I drew a picture of a robot with a sword, and I said, "Why on God's great earth does this robot have a sword?" So I sat down and figured it out, and that was the start of D'ARC TANGENT. I did an early comics version, which was my senior class project in cartooning class at art school. In 1979, I was taking it around and showing it to people. I sent it off to all the undergrounds, and those suckers didn't even mail it back to me, even though I sent them

Art ... 1985 Phil Foglio
Art ... 1985 Phil Foglio

poorly drawn.' I said 'So much for EPIC.'"

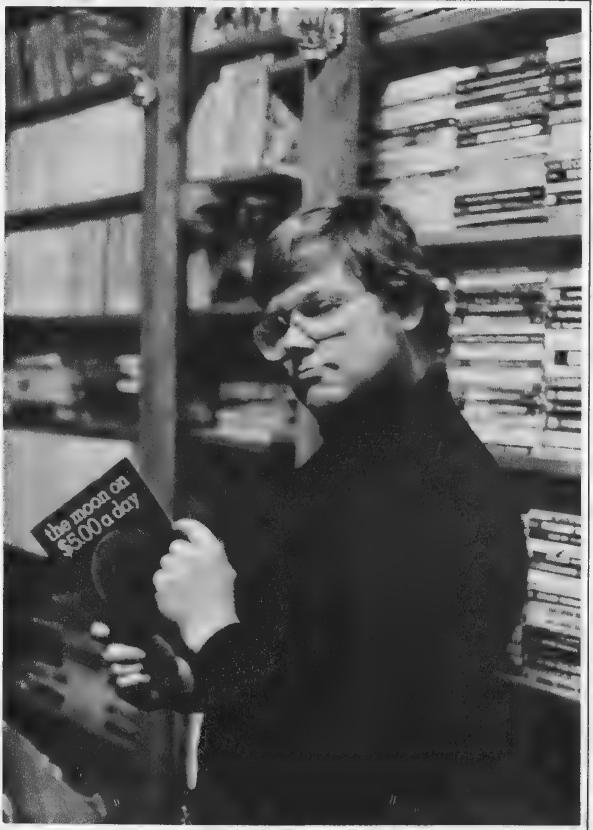
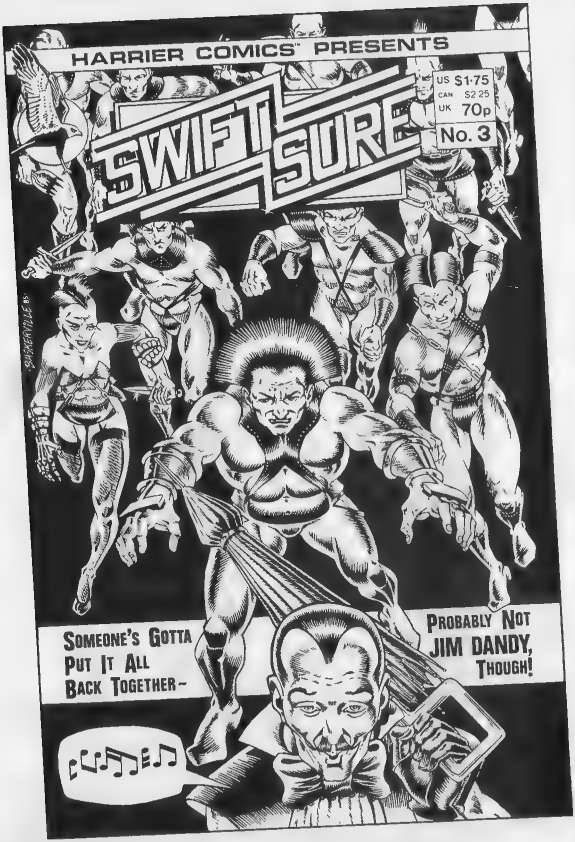


Photo: Pat O'Neill



TRY IT - YOU'LL LIKE IT!

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"Freff was erasing my pencils and redrawing them. D'ARC TANGENT is not being produced now."

D'Arc Tangent (pro version) 1984 Fantasy Factory / (fan version) 1985 Foglio
BUT, AS HE QUICKLY DISCOVERS, HIS OPPONENT IS FASTER ..
TOUGHER...
CLANG
AND WORST OF ALL...
TIRELESS
ARG-TANGENT! FEAR FOR OUR CHASTITY!
UNFORTUNATELY SHE HAD SUFFICIENT TIME TO ENTER FULLY INTO CONTACT COMPLEXES WITH MARVIN. UNLESS SHE RETURNS IN TIME SHE WILL BE IN SUBSPACE HORF
AND SHE KNOWS IT!
SURELY TARGUT WILL SOLVE A RECALL. THEY UNDERSTAND THE FACTS AS WELL AS OURSELVES.
HOWEVER, THIS PERSON IS NO KLINGON CRIMINAL
I DO NOT KNOW. ORD MARVIN, THE ANDROID WHO WOULD INDUSTRIONAL BE FOR...

Left: Fan version of D'ARC TANGENT — matches page 14 of pro version (right).

SASEs. Took it to the WorldCon and a number of people looked at it and said, "Really nice — if it was a novel I'd buy it." One of the people who saw it there was **Freff**, through I didn't really know him at the time.

It pretty much got consigned to the "Well, one day . . ." file with a number of other projects. Then around early 1982, **Freff** and I were sitting around my apartment saying, "We should work on something together. . ." And I said, "Well, I've got this robot thing in the files . . ." I pulled it out and started to work on that.

In 1983 — after pushing back our publishing debut three times, I might add — the book finally came out. And did very, very well.

PAT: *Got a lot of good reviews. . .*

PHIL: The reviewers all but threw themselves down and said, "Aah, the white gods have come!" Which I thought was pretty good for a first book. I thought, "Gee, this is gonna be a real blast!" Unfortunately, around that time, I began to notice that the exact same production problems we'd been having with #1, we were still having with #2 — in fact, it had gotten even worse. The breaking point came when I found out that **Freff** was erasing my pencils and redrawing them. That's when I said, "This blows! What's the point?"

We dissolved the partnership and we're currently making legal talk-talk to figure out what's going on. Basically, I say, "It's my character, I created it, I've got the rights, *(rude noise)* go away!"

I can feel myself slipping into irrationality over this point, so I'll simply say, D'ARC TANGENT is not being produced now, and anyone who thinks it's going to be coming out soon, should remember their caveats.

PAT: *Going into your background — I remember the first time I saw any of your stuff was in a STAR TREK fanzine published out of Michigan called MENAGERIE. Is the material in ST 'zines from around that time, 1974, your earliest published work?*

PHIL: Absolutely. I went to TorCon, the 1972 World SF Con in Toronto, and there I saw an advertisement for a thing called the Klingon Empire Appointment Calendar. It was published by Boojums Press in Ann Arbor, run by **Paula Smith** and **Sharon Ferraro**, and I wrote to them, saying, "I think this is a wonderful thing that will awe my friends and frighten my cats, I must have one," and I drew a little face next to the signature. I got back a Klingon Calendar, and a note that said, "Gee, we really love your artwork — send us some." The only thing they saw was this little squiggle next to my signature. . .

PAT: *Easily impressed.*

PHIL: Yeah. Then I looked at the artwork on the calendar and I could see why. It was — I'll be kind — it was terrible.

They published my first stuff. I sent them a sketch and they put it on the cover of the

"INFERIOR FIVE was the best of the humor books. ANGEL & THE APE was interesting."

next issue of MENAGERIE, issue #4.

PAT: *Is that the one of the band in Starfleet uniforms, with the girl dancing in the foreground?*

PHIL: That's the first one. When they closed down MENAGERIE, and wanted something from me for the last issue, I redid the same picture — so it was the last thing I did for them, too.

So, I started in the TREK 'zines, and I never really started selling stuff for money until later that year, when I went to a regional SF con called ChambanaCon. I looked around the art show, and they said, "There's an art auction later tonight," and I said, "Too bad, I don't have anything with me." We went out to dinner and while we were waiting for our meal, I pulled out my Rapidograph and drew a picture on the plate. I stole the plate and took it back to the convention, and we put it in the auction as a "souvenir plate of ChambanaCon." It went for a whole seven-and-a-half dollars. To let you know how things have gone downhill since then — that paid for my convention.

PAT: *You're kidding.*

PHIL: Well, when you sleep ten to a room, and you drive down in the trunk of somebody's car, you know...

PAT: *And the plate idea has become pretty much standard procedure at every convention you go to...*

PHIL: I have been to over 150 conventions, I have missed doing a plate at maybe two of them.

PAT: *What's the most you ever got for a plate?*

PHIL: $160.

PAT: *Where was that?*

PHIL: I don't remember. *(Laughter.)* I think it shocked me. It happened last year; it might have been up in Canada.

PAT: *What was your first professional sale?*

PHIL: I've still got that. It was to ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, which had just gotten cranked up at that time. The next sale was to DRAGON MAGAZINE — published by TSR Games. I did a few more covers for them. After I moved to new York, I came up with an idea for a joke, a one-page joke. Actually, I came up with one joke, and said, "Gee, I don't want to bother with just one joke...," so I sat down and came up with a whole page of jokes, and tied them together, sent it off to them, and said, "Do you want this?" They wrote back, "Not only will we take this, but if you got any more, keep them coming." I said, "Holy Cow! Steady work!"

And that started "What's New?" which ran for three years in DRAGON, never missed a month. We started out one page black-and-white, then went to color. And each time they were the ones who suggested the change. They said, "How'd you like to go color?" Okay. "How'd you like to do more than one page?" Twist my arm. Biggest I ever got was four pages. Toward the end it started to get tough, because I have never gamed in my life, ever. And making all this stuff up out of whole cloth was beginning to get tiring. So I said, "Look, I want to take a break, a hiatus." And on its third anniversary, I closed it down. People have expressed an interest in picking up the series again, with the added inducement that I don't have to stick to gaming, I can do anything I want. I'm thinking about it.

PAT: *If you could work for one of the majors — Marvel, DC, First — what would you most want to do?*

PHIL: DC had a number of humor books that I thought were really nice — JERRY LEWIS, INFERIOR FIVE, ANGEL AND THE APE — those are the ones that I read and said, "Hey, I like this." JERRY LEWIS, of course, you can't do anything with any more, because DC lost the rights. INFERIOR FIVE was certainly the best of the humor books — if only because it had more characters. ANGEL AND THE APE, however, had some of the same problems that all DC humor books had — they set up these characters and situations, and then threw them out the window, doing nothing with the possibilities. ANGEL AND THE APE, when it was good, was an interesting concept. I want to do something with it.

I had an idea for an ANGEL AND THE APE mini-series. I showed it to my friend **Doug Rice**, who does DYNAMO JOE for First, and he proceeded to pick my story apart. So I haven't submitted it to DC yet; they don't even know I'm working on it.

Phil's favorites, ANGEL & THE APE — a DC series he feels didn't deserve to die.

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"ROBOTECH MASTERS is definitely going to stand out. Mike Baron is scripting it."

NEIL VOKES

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Neil D. Vokes.
Born: 12 May 1954.
Occupation: Artist.
Favorite Comics: ELEMENTALS, NEXUS, DR. STRANGE, SWAMP THING, MAGE.
Favorite Artists: Neal Adams, Steve Ditko

I first met Neil while putting together the Bill Willingham interview. Other than being a good artist and all around nice guy, Neil is also one who loves to use puns. Not as much as Rich Rankin, perhaps — but he's definitely up there! The following interview took place at Fat Jack's Comicrypt (2008 Sansom Street, Philadelphia, PA), so thanks to Mike Ferrero. As for additional info about the artist of Comico's ROBOTECH MASTERS, I'll let Neil speak for himself...

DAN SMEDDY: *First of all, I want to apologize for the mispronunciation of your name in the Bill Willingham interview in issue #17. It came out Neil Rhodes instead of Neil Vokes. So on behalf of Dave Kraft and the whole staff of COMICS INTERVIEW I want to say, "Sorry."*

NEIL VOKES: I don't accept your apology, Dan.

DAN: *Oh. That's it. Turn off the tape.*

NEIL: Fine, that is all there is to it. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Well, let me ask you about this ROBOTECH/MACROSS series. How did you get the assignment?*

NEIL: Actually, I think Comico was desperate at the time. They needed an artist real quick who could draw the robots and was willing to do it.

DAN: *Are you a Japanese robot fan?*

NEIL: I wouldn't say I am a fan of Japanese robots. I don't know too many robots, personally. I am a fan of Japanese animation, yes, if you put it that way, although I think that I'm one of the furthest away from the Japanese style.

DAN: *Did you have difficulty adapting to their style?*

NEIL: I did at first — like the eyes, and the little monkey hands. Now I hope there aren't any Japanese fans out there who are going to send nasty letters to me. *(Laughter.)* I think that it's great stuff, but I really don't draw like that. That's all there is to it. On the issue I just finished, you wouldn't even know — except for maybe the girl's eyes or something — that it is even a Japanese book. I'm about as far away from it as I can be.

DAN: *What is the name of this new MACROSS book that you're now doing?*

NEIL: ROBOTECH MASTERS. It's called SOUTHERN CROSS in Japan. Personally, I think that's a better title, but they wanted to tie the Robotech thing together.

DAN: *It does seem kind of strange, since it is known to the Japanese and some American fans of the series as SOUTHERN CROSS. Is this comic extended over to Japan?*

NEIL: I don't think so. I think it would have to be legally untangled to go back there. There was a lot to get it over here and get it untangled. Personally, I don't think the Japanese would like it... I think they'd think we were bastardizing their original concept.

My Robotech title is more American-looking now than anything. I think what **Reggie Byers** is doing in his Robotech title — his style is much more influenced by that than mine, and so is **Mike Leeke's** and **Dave Johnson's**. They are a lot closer to that

"It's like getting the STAR WARS trilogy

Japanese style than I am. Their titles are ROBOTECH: THE MACROSS SAGA, and ROBOTECH: THE NEW GENERATION, those are the ones that those three fellows are working on. But mine, ROBOTECH MASTERS, is definitely going to be the one which stands out, not because it is better, but because it is going to look different from the rest of them.

DAN: *Think you'll get any flak from the die-hard fans of Japanese animation?*

NEIL: I'd probably get flak if I drew it the right way — well, not the right way, but the original way. You'll probably get flak either way, 'cause you don't have the original artist drawing it. So you've got to expect to get flak from somebody.

DAN: *Do they let you put your own ideas into the book?*

NEIL: They have to let me, not so much in the written word, but in the story — because I have to plot it out from the video. They just give me the video and I pace it.

DAN: *The comics are adaptations from the video?*

NEIL: Yeah. Although **Mike Baron** is now scripting it, and we're not doing it word for word **Diana Schutz**, the editor, said that she'd rather we did it our own way. You know, keep the essence of it — go with the flow — but give it our own look. That's what we are doing.

DAN: *So there's no freedom to kill or wound a particular character?*

NEIL: No, you'd have to change the essential storyline. You can't change it that radically. The story in the cartoon has a beginning, a middle, and an end, so you can't suddenly go off on a different tangent. It wouldn't be fair. It might be fun, but it wouldn't be fair. Maybe after the cartoons are over, if there is enough interest and people want the books to keep going. But not at the outset. I think the book's projected length of time is three years — about nine issues a year. A total of eighty-five episodes, divided into approximately thirds, so each book should take approximately twenty or thirty issues.

DAN: *Do the three titles tie in to each other?*

NEIL: Oh yes. They are set in three separate time periods on Earth. And they are essentially about three different alien invasions, all trying to get this protoculture. I am sure the term has not turned up in the comic yet. The protoculture is supposed to be the explanation for why these robots are so human, I guess. They can change and transform and stuff. I think the protoculture is supposed to be the essence of each particular title. That's the tie-in. ROBOTECH MASTERS, the title of my book, refers to the actual people who invented this stuff, and they've come all the way to Earth to get back the remnants of it — which was in the actual MACROSS ship. It's all very complicated. I don't really know all the details, but they do tie together. The strange thing is that they are all coming out at the same time. It is sort of like getting the STAR WARS trilogy all at once. You don't have to wait three years. These books will be coming out simultaneously. They feel they have to do that, because the cartoon being only eighty-five episodes, five days a week, you figure it out...

DAN: *Only a few months.*

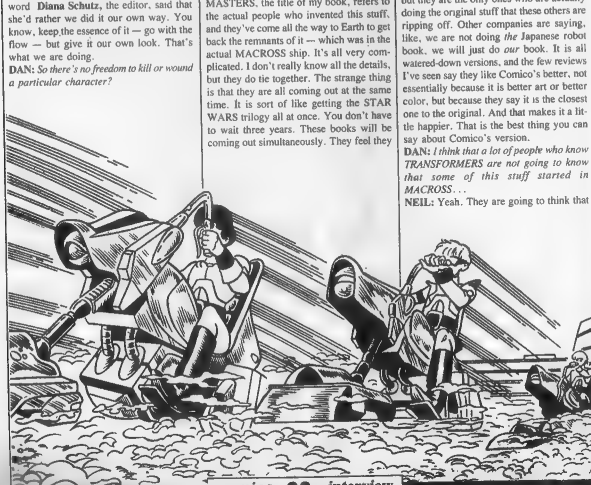
NEIL: Right. You can't have one book come out and be only twenty-seven issues and then the second book come out — by that time the cartoon will be running two years — in re-runs. So you have to put all three books out at once. That's the theory.

DAN: *Back in the early days of Japanese animated series such as ULTRA-MAN, ASTRO BOY and SPEEDRACER there was no real American merchandising on them, which was really a shame... and the toys now are really hard to find. They sell for quite a few bucks.*

NEIL: I guess America is a little slow in catching on to these things. You know, comics are still considered somewhat childish. Most of them are, in many ways. This robot thing is catching on now. It's a big trend. Everyone is doing them. I don't think there is one company — even Archie — that's not doing some type of robot variation. Working for the company, I don't know if I am just sticking up for Comico, but they are the only ones who are actually doing the original stuff that these others are ripping off. Other companies are saying, like, we are not doing *the* Japanese robot book, we will just do *our* book. It is all watered-down versions, and the few reviews I've seen say they like Comico's better, not essentially because it is better art or better color, but because they say it is the closest one to the original. And that makes it a little happier. That is the best thing you can say about Comico's version.

DAN: *I think that a lot of people who know TRANSFORMERS are not going to know that some of this stuff started in MACROSS...*

NEIL: Yeah. They are going to think that



1985 Comico Art ©1985 Robotech™ TM Revell, Inc. ...1985 Tatsunoko/Harmony Gold

all at once. You don't have to wait 3 years."

we are ripping it off. But TRANSFORMERS are essentially a variation of the MACROSS robots. The Macross series was out, I think, way before TRANSFORMERS ever came out. This is not to say that Marvel is doing a terrible book. I don't read it. That doesn't mean it's not a wonderful comic. So there! There is my political statement for the interview. The actual concept of robots that can change shape was done in — the robots go back to GIGANTOR, which I believe was the first giant robot. So that was in the '60s. So actually any Americanized version is just a watered down English translation or not even a translation.

DAN: *What we know as TRANSFORMERS were really done in Japan for the MICRONAUTS figures that we had a few years back. They brought them over here under the name Transformers because the Micronauts, their time had come and gone, and the kids weren't buying them. Yet this was a neat toy or a neat idea — a robot turns into a jet or a radio.*

NEIL: To get back on the TRANSFORMERS, I hate to say this, but I don't really see the story going anywhere. There doesn't seem to be any progression as to what's happening. They always confront each other. Of course, I just said I don't read the comic, so you can't really go by that. Let's say I've seen the cartoon, and if the cartoon is like the comic, then they don't seem to go anywhere with it. They just meet, they yell at each other a lot, they shoot at each other a lot. And then they both fly away and that's it until the next episode — where they do it all over again.

The interesting thing about the original stuff — like the Comico versions — is that things are actually happening. People are dying, machines are being destroyed, old charaters are being killed, new characters are being created, people get married, there is a progression going on. There is not the need to keep that robot because he is being merchandised that week — well, the Japanese don't care about that, they'll just keep making them. They'll make a hundred more. They can keep making them, they can have them coming out of their wazoo. If Japanese have a wazoo — I'm not sure.

DAN: *If not, I am sure they can invent one and change it into a robot. So tell me, Neil, how'd you get into comics?*

NEIL: How could I possibly get into one of those things? They are much too large.

DAN: *No, no, no that is not what I meant, I meant in the business of comics, the production of comics.*

NEIL: Well, I am a late bloomer in that aspect. Those who have read the vital stastics know that I am 31 years old now. What the hell is he starting out so late in drawing Japanese comics for? That is because I wandered around for about ten years of my life — from about 17 to about 27 or so, when I met my wife to be. You can say I was searching for myself, but I wasn't searching for myself, I was just wandering around not doing a damned thing. Well, I drew a little, but I never thought of it as a career until about five years ago, strangely enough. So then I sat down and tried to learn more about it, bought the **Burne Hogarth** BOOK OF ANATOMY. At the start, my art style looked like my two favorite artists, **Ditko** and **Adams** — a lot more probably like

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"I was the house-husband. I did all the cooking."

Adams back then. By learning from **Hogarth's** books, I didn't start drawing so much like **Hogarth** as I started drawing like myself, whatever style it is I have — if I have a style. Fortunately, although I was influenced by **Adams** and **Ditko**, I don't think I draw like either one of them. That, I am happy about.

DAN: *I'm surprised to hear your influences, since I don't really see it in your work.*

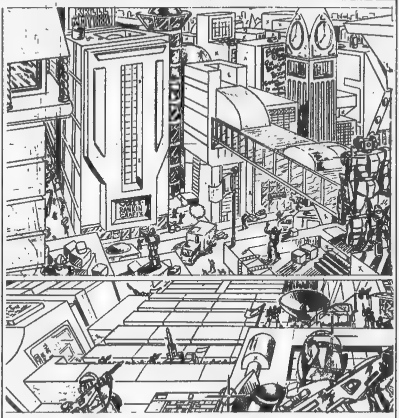
NEIL: Sometimes you'll see **Ditko** in the background. Sometimes I come up with these bizarre faces in the background which **Ditko** always loved to do. Not so much the lead faces, but the character faces. Anyway, I just sat down and said, "I am seriously going to try to make a living out of this." Of course, my Father didn't think I could, and to this day he still thinks so.

DAN: *As all fathers do.*

NEIL: I showed him my tax statement. "The *government* knows I am making money at it." To start, I was unemployed for a while. I was married then and my wife had to support me. She's a little woman. It wasn't easy then. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *You mean carrying you up the steps and stuff?*

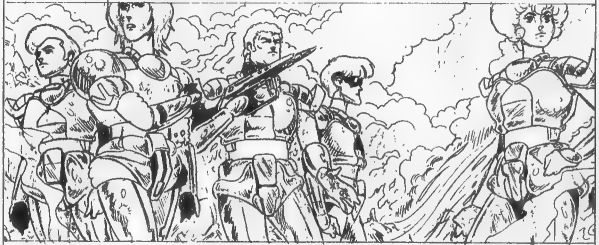
NEIL: Carrying me up and down the steps. I was the house-husband. I did all the cooking and what I did all day was I'd draw, and try to get a little better at it.



Samples of Neil's detailed pencils, from ROBOTECH MASTERS 2.

Eventually, I met **Rich Rankin**, in Heroes World. He was a manager there. I saw some of his drawings on the wall behind the counter. He wasn't there, so one day when he was in I met him and we started talking. He wanted to be a penciller also, and as we all know by now, he is not penciling. At least not very often. A little twist of fate. I also wanted to be a penciller, so we agreed to try an experiment. We came up with a story. We would do two versions of it. I would do pencils of one, and he would ink it, and he would pencil the other version of it, and I would ink it. We never got past the first half of it — he caught on so fast to inking, even though he had never done it before. That was the story that appeared in PRIMER #6. The Gauntlet story. It is hard to tell from that story — as early as that — that he had never inked before. He just picked it right up. It was natural for him.

We sent copies of this Gauntlet story to every one of the companies — including Comico, of course. We got a very nice letter from **Joe Staton** when he was working for First. He was art editor there at the time. That was probably the nicest letter we got back about the things, but again it was, "we are only putting out a couple of books right now." This was the beginning of their line.



1985 Tatsunoko/Harmony Gold "Robotech" TM Revell, Inc Art - 1985 Comico

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"MACROSS was out way before TRANSFORMERS."

Art 1986 Comico 1985 Tatsunoko/Harmony Gold "Robotech" TM Revell, Inc

And they said, "We'll be in touch." But of course, nothing ever happened. Suddenly one day, Comico called us and said, "Would you like us to print your story in our PRIMER book?" We said, "S-u-r-e, why not?" even though we hadn't really expected that story to be printed. 'Cause there was no real story.

DAN: *It just starts and it really doesn't end.*

NEIL: The hero just runs around finding things, and there really is no ending. But Comico really thought that was funny. Which shows their sense of humor. They thought this was quite amusing, that is the main reason they wanted to showcase the story. Well, it took a long time for that story to get printed. It eventually appeared in issue #6, which was also the premiere of EVANGELINE. So naturally everyone bought the issue because of EVANGALINE. . . I don't think that our story made a big impression on very many people.

I don't know if anyone remembers AZ. The big pink fellow. Sort of Comico's version of the Hulk. But, in the meantime, I just for the hell of it, drew the characters. **Phil Lasorda** said, "That's pretty good, why don't you try to do up an issue." I eventually drew three issues of AZ, which to this day have never been printed and probably never will be. It was even announced that we were doing them — in COMICS INTERVIEW #4 it says, "**Neil Vokes, Rich Rankin** on AZ." But it never got that far.

Rich and I were sitting around doing nothing again. So we got some more samples together. Rich may have tried to go through Marvel. I had no interest in going to work for Marvel, for reasons that I am not willing to go into. I made an appointment to see **Dick Giordano**. I thought he was a wonderful person. He was just so nice to me. I was nobody. He was really nice about the samples. He made a few suggestions and said, "Try again." So I did a couple more and this time I did one of The Creeper, which was always one of my favorite DCs — again by **Steve Ditko**. I always wished that someone would do the character right. I mean, I don't think even **Ditko** did the stories right. I wanted to do it with the idea of the Creeper not being just a guy faking being able to be a crackpot. *He is a crackpot!* They thought that was exactly the direction that they wanted — but for various reasons, that didn't go anywhere.

And then, out of the blue, Comico asked Rich and myself to come up there one day. They were starting this whole MACROSS comic series. MACROSS #1 was done by **Carl Macek**, who is very established, and **Svea Stauch,** and was inked and colored by various members of the Comico Bullpen. It took them a long time to do it. And I think

Art by Neil & Rich Rankin for ROBOTECH: THE MACROSS SAGA 3.

what they wanted to do was change the whole process and make it more of a regular comic, flat coloring and everything, so they wanted to do something a little simpler.

And if nothing else what Rich and I were trying to prove was that we were reliable. It was not necessarily that we were the best artists that they could have hired, we were reliable enough so that we could hopefully get #2 done on schedule. We had about two weeks to do the whole issue. It was good practice, that was the way we looked at it. we were getting paid for it, and we didn't have a helluva lot to complain about.

And then we were asked to do MACROSS #3 in about a week. Actually, I am fonder of that one than I am of issue #2, even though we had to do it a lot quicker. The way they were plotting the book was like page for page, word for word, and I can't say I was speaking from many years experience — but from reading them for as long as I have, I just didn't think it was working as a comic. So, essentially, I replotted it even though I had a script and everything. I changed a lot of the premises. I took it upon myself to change it for the better, I thought.

DAN: *I see.*

NEIL: I used my own best judgement. I used the basis of the story, following the plotline. I just drew it my own way. I didn't sit in front of a video machine and watch a scene, freeze frame it and study it, then draw it shot-for-shot. I thought, "They might as well put a book together that is just frame blow-ups and print it up and just put little word balloons on them, if they want that. Why hire artists to draw if they don't want them to draw something?" So I just went for it. The funny thing about this is the two videos that I was given for MACROSS #2 and #3 were in Japanese. And if you've ever had to plot something that was in a foreign language and you didn't understand any of that language — it's not very easy. You have no idea what they are saying in the dialogue. .

DAN: *There's no possible way to do it.*

NEIL: Well, there's a possible way to do it, but it doesn't always turn out right in the end. I was a lot happier with MACROSS #3, because I did it with my own layouts,

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Demon, Scout previews in AMAZING HEROES #80/#81

It's the end of summer, but things just keep getting hotter in **Amazing Heroes** (voted favorite publication about comics by readers of **The Comics Buyer's Guide**!) **#80** takes a first look at MATT WAGNER's **Demon.** D.C.'s nastiest hero also graces the cover and gets his own Hero History. Plus, an article on WALLY WOOD's little-known "Mars Patrol" series.

Amazing Heroes #81 previews **Scout** by TIMOTHY TRUMAN, and sports a dynamic Truman cover for the occasion. Marvel's most forgotten hero receives his due in the Bloodstone Hero History by R.A. Jones (**CBG** readers' favorite writer about comics!). And, of course, the **Amazing Heroes** Top 100.

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"There will be those who say Mike Baron is lowering himself to do robot books."

my own pacing, I didn't have to go by anybody else's work, and then Carl scripted from that.

DAN: *How did you switch from MACROSS to ROBOTECH MASTERS?*

NEIL: They gave me a choice, which was nice — they said, "Which of these three titles do you want to do?" I'd seen the MACROSS stuff, obviously, since I'd drawn it. They had a poster of SOUTHERN CROSS, which were all these what *I* thought were robots — fancy-looking effeminate robots in this big poster. For MOSPEADA, there was no poster, but I think they told me it was a bunch of motorcycles — I had seen one of the toys, **Matt Wagner** had one. I was never big on drawing motorcycles, so I took the one in the middle, because these effeminate-looking robots look kind of interesting. I found out later that they weren't robots — that they were combat armor. Which is a bitch to draw, I have to tell you, because everyone's armor and everyone's uniform is totally different from the one next to it! You have to keep track of all that stuff.

DAN: *And how did Mike Baron come to be writing ROBOTECH MASTERS?*

NEIL: Apparently, **Carl Macek** is not going to be scripting any of the books any more . . . it turned out Diana knew that **Mike Baron** was looking for some extra work, or extra money as it were, whichever. There will be those who say that he is lowering himself after NEXUS to do robot books. But apparently he went for it — again it might be for the money, I don't know, I haven't spoken to Mike that much yet. So far it is looking good.

I think Mike is doing what I am trying to do with the artwork, which is just using the story and the characters and the plot as a basis and then doing it in his own style. He is actually coming up with some very interesting stuff. Diana tells me that Mike is having a wonderful time because he is putting a sense of humor into the story now. The stories don't really have much of a sense of humor, as far as I could tell, and he is adding that little bit extra to it. What he is doing is exactly what I had hoped, which is following the lead of my artwork. He is writing it the way it is supposed to be written. Mike so far is sticking close to the cartoon series but, as I say, he is doing it in his style. We are hoping that people will accept it the way it is.

DAN: *Would you like to do something with Mike Baron other than the robots?*

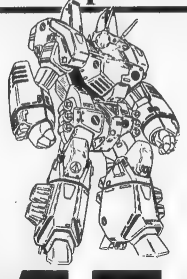
NEIL: Oh, please. *Please.* I am going to talk to him about it. I am going to see if he is at all interested in doing something else, another series. 'Cause Rich and I want to do something in our own style — nothing based on a cartoon or a toy or anything else. I guess it is sort of presumptuous of us — there are well-known artists who don't have their own series. We just want to try if the opportunity arises — if Mike wants to do it, great. If he doesn't — we'll find somebody else, anyway. For all I know he has got 100 other things that he has got planned. Just writing NEXUS alone, I know, takes up a hell of a lot of his time. And BADGER. It would be fantastic if he was willing to do something. And we will see what happens. I am not promising anybody that that is going to happen

Here was something that boosted my ego immensely: I talked to him for about five minutes on the phone when he received the first half of the second issue. And he said, "Neil, do you have any extra time?" And I said, "Well, Diana makes sure that I don't have any extra time — but I'll make some. What do you have in mind?" "Do up some sketches of Nexus and Badger. They might need somebody to do a fill-in." "And right away I thought, "Geez, from this Japanese stuff they thought I could do NEXUS?" And he said, "Well, I want to see what your own style looks like." I haven't yet had the time to do that, but I am definitely sitting down one of these days and drawing those sketches. The mere fact that he asked makes it worthwhile to me. Even if he decided that I wasn't quite right for either book, just that he asked me to do it, has made my entire career. *The* **Mike Baron** asked me to draw sketches for NEXUS! I mean no one draws NEXUS except for **Steve Rude**.

A sample page by Neil starring Jack Kirby's One Man Army Corps — OMAC.

OMAC — DC Comics Inc

"My job as producer of ROBOTECH is



CARL MACEK

1985 Tatsunoko/Harmony Gold "Robotech" TM Revell, Inc

Anyone intimately involved with comics over the past ten years or so should have at least a fleeting awareness of the name Carl Macek, which has appeared in the pages of the shortlived Seaboard/Atlas line of comics in the mid-Seventies, as well as turning up here and there in ads for a California comic art gallery and — most recently — as the writer of Comico's MACROSS comic book and producer of the ROBOTECH syndicated cartoon series.

Since robo-mania is sweeping the country, from the pages of comics to the shelves of toy stores to the Saturday morning television screen, it seemed high time we found out all about the high tech Japanese/American MACROSS/ROBOTECH animated series that's been singled out by so many as an example of the best the field has to offer — while also taking the opportunity to learn more about the mysterious man known as Macek.

Shel Dorf was singled out for this behind-the-scenes story, and his conversation with Carl follows . . .

SHEL DORF: *Carl, you don't draw, you don't write — or do you write? — yet you're in animation. You find yourself suddenly a producer of the ROBOTECH syndicated cartoon series for American television. How did you get involved with the project?*

CARL MACEK: Initially, I was approached by Harmony Gold to handle an aspect of their licensing to the specialty retail market. My efforts resulted in the Comico deal for the adaptation of MACROSS. The company was impressed by the speed with which the deal was done, and asked if I could do anything besides selling licenses. This opened the door for me to actually try my hand at producing animated television programming.

SHEL: *You make it sound rather simple . . .*

CARL: Actually, there were some other considerations. Primarily, the merchandising. We had been talking with Revell, Inc. about a potential co-production deal on the series. They were interested only if the name of the series was changed from MACROSS to something which reflected their new product line of "Robotech" models. After a series of fruitless meetings with corporate heads in Los Angeles and France, it was decided that rather than get involved in a co-production venture, the proposed television series — now called ROBOTECH — would in actuality exist as a co-licensing venture. Complicated but necessary to start the ball rolling for a daily syndicated series which was scheduled to go on the air in less than six months after the agreements had been signed.

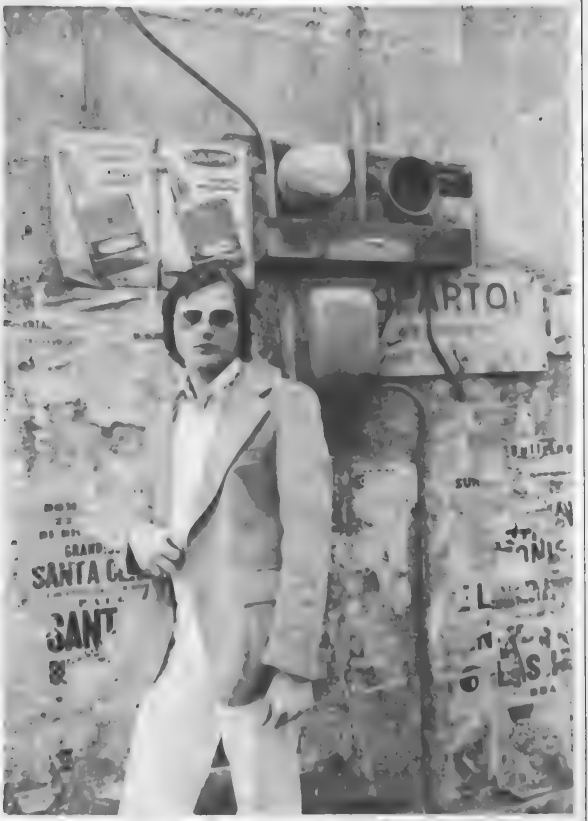
SHEL: *What are your chores as producer of ROBOTECH?*

CARL: That is fairly complicated but I'll try to make it as simple as possible. Harmony Gold is the leading distributor of animation throughout the world — foreign distribution of animation. We wanted to have an American television program because we

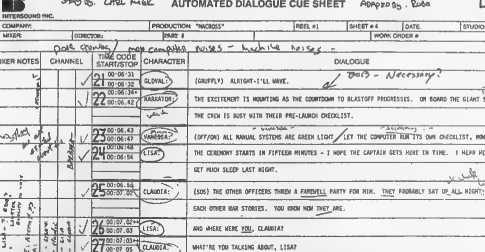
VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Carl Macek
Born: Pittsburg, PA — 1951
Occupation: Producer
Favorite Films: Too many to note here . . . I just love the Medium of Film.
Favorite Comics: Most recently, AMERICAN FLAGG, Simonson's THOR, NEXUS . . . and scattered issues here and there among the hundreds that are released each month.
Hobby: Owning my own art gallery and comic shop so that I can immerse myself in the *genre* (like Uncle Scrooge in his Money Bins) and get a feeling for what fans are most interested in
Goals: To expand the level of consciousness for executives who control television and motion picture distribution. It is a lifelong ambition for the re-education of people out of touch with popular culture.
Least Favorite Nickname: "The Professor" — it stems from a period of work where I was teaching college while doing my graduate work and it seems to have stuck.

basically to conceptualize the story. . .”



"In L.A. it's the #1 rated show in its time


AUTOMATED DIALOGUE CUE SHEET
INTERSOUND INC.
COMPANY:
PRODUCTION: "MACROSS"
REEL #1
SHEET # 4
DATE:
STUDIO
MIXER:
DIRECTOR:
WORK ORDER #
MIXER NOTES
CHANNEL
TIME CODE START/STOP
CHARACTER
DIALOGUE
GLOVAL:
(GRUFFLY) ALRIGHT-I'LL HAVE.
THE EXCITEMENT IS MOUNTING AS THE COUNTDOWN TO BLASTOFF PROGRESSES. ON BOARD THE GIANT SPACESHIP,
NARRATOR:
THE CREW IS BUSY WITH THEIR PRE-LAUNCH CHECKLIST.
(OFF/ON) ALL MANUAL SYSTEMS ARE GREEN LIGHT - LET THE COMPUTER RUN ITS OWN CHECKLIST, MIM.
THE CEREMONY STARTS IN FIFTEEN MINUTES - I HOPE THE CAPTAIN GETS HERE IN TIME. I HEAR HE DIDN'T
LISA:
GET MUCH SLEEP LAST NIGHT.
CLAUDIA:
(SOS) THE OTHER OFFICERS THREW A FAREWELL PARTY FOR HIM. THEY PROBABLY SAT UP ALL NIGHT-TELLING
EACH OTHER WAR STORIES. YOU KNOW MOM THEY ARE.
AND WHERE WERE YOU, CLAUDIA?
LISA:
WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT, LISA?
CLAUDIA:
HA!....YOU DIDN'T COME IN UNTIL FOUR THIS MORNING...YOU MUST HAVE BEEN PARTYING, TOO.
LISA:
YOU JEALOUS? I HAD A LATE DINNER WITH CAPTAIN FORKER....WHAT?
CLAUDIA:

Carl writes the story synopsis and narration, from which a dialogue writer prepares a script to be recorded (above), which Carl checks for continuity.

were in Europe and South America and Africa and the Far East — we thought it was important to get into the United States. I was hired and given the assignment to create a television series for the U.S. and I looked through the library of material that Harmony Gold had, and there was nothing that was long enough to survive syndication. You need a minimum of 65 episodes to have a syndicated television show.

SHEL: *Is this a half hour or an hour show?*

CARL: A half hour. Sixty-five half hours. In order to do this, I had to combine material that existed in different forms to come up with a minimum of 65 episodes. So what I did was to choose three different series produced by a Japanese studio called Tatsunoko Studios. They are very famous in Japan — the equivalent of Hanna-Barbera in the U.S. They had been producing television shows for 20 to 25 years, and their stuff has always been quite well received, they produced SPEEDRACER in the early '60s, and they produced a lot of children's classics. Most recently they did a series of unique science-fiction programs, one of which — MACROSS — was very successful. Another one of theirs was called SOUTHERN CROSS, and a third one, MOSPEADA. (Mos-pee-a-da is how most people pronounce it.) MACROSS was a fairly successful series. The other two series were not as successful — either commercially or aesthetically. They just didn't hit the nail on the head the way the first series did.

SHEL: *Were the series related?*

CARL: What we did was combine these three really diverse series. We peeled away the veneer of the existing story of all three series, kept the spirit of the original Japanese action, and proceeded to rewrite all of the storylines, all of the plots, so that we ultimately came up with an 85 episode series that had continuity — that amounts, in effect, to a 42 ½ hour mini-series. From episode one to 85 it tells a single story. There are some obvious gaps in continuity to fill in later on but, by and large, it tells a single story. My job as producer is basically to conceptualize the story, write that story, give it to a dialogue-replacement writer, who then is skilled enough to manipulate the writing so that dialogue expressed matches the mouth movements of characters who have already been animated.

SHEL: *I had an opportunity to tour Intersound Studio. Your wife, Svea Stauch, took me through it. I had a chance to see some American voice actors adding dialogue soundtracks. It was explained to me that when you add American voices you wipe out the soundtrack completely, so you have to put back the sound effects. It was quite an amazing process.*

CARL: It is very difficult to do. Since the character has already been animated, his mouth already moves in a certain way, so we have to find words to match that and also tell a continuous story — a story that has some point.

SHEL: *So this goes much further than just translating?*

CARL: Absolutely.

SHEL: *There must also be a difference in standards as to what the Japanese audience will accept and what will be boring to American audiences. Can you go into that a little bit?*

CARL: It is not so much the concept of boredom — it is more the concept of cultural awareness. The Japanese have a different cultural attitude by and large than Americans do. One of the problems was to "Westernize" the concepts — to take out

© 1985 Tatsunoko/Harmony Gold "Robotech" TM Revell, Inc. Art © 1985 Comico

slot except for ABC NIGHTLY NEWS."

ethnicity that is particularly Japanese and replace it with a Western attitude. You don't understand it, because you don't see it happening when you are just watching it. A lot of the animation has been re-timed using a device called a Bausch Telescene Converter — it is a digital computer. This digital computer-driven film chain can actually re-time the animation. We can make things that might seem dull and boring in the Japanese version seem natural in the Western version. Faster. We can change the pattern of editing. So basically I go in and completely redesign the scene to a pattern that is Westernized. I rebuild a story from scratch. I then give it to a group of writers who then script to the mouth movements. Next, I supervise the selection of voices, the laying down of the tracks, the final assembling of the material, the final remix and the editing. When you do this type of stuff, you do it so fast that it's almost like producing live television.

SHEL: *So you write the story outlines as well?*

CARL: Oh yeah.

SHEL: *But you are not actually writing the screenplay, you give that to others . . .*

CARL: I don't have time — I have about 85 people who work for me.

SHEL: *Eighty-five people? What do these people do?*

CARL: Writers, directors, actors, mixers, technicians, sound editors, film team editors, video tape editors, vault librarians, *etcetera*. It is a large organization. I have four shifts that work during a given day. Each shift has an eight-hour day. In a normal working day I have four shifts — so I have 32 hours worth of man-hours, labor intensive work, going on in a single day. In every week, I have 96 hours of production being done.

SHEL: *That is astonishing. How is it doing ?*

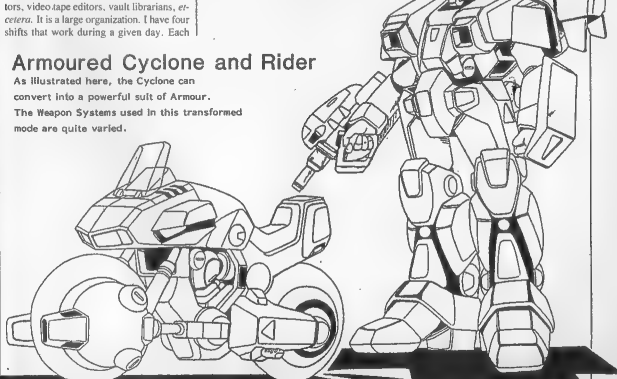
CARL: The show is a remarkable success story, because we are producing a first run syndicated show, and tradionally all of these shows have had ancillary support from toys and television advertising that would plant an awareness into the public as to the identity of the product — like HE-MAN, G.I.JOE, THE TRANSFORMERS — where you see toys and television commercials all along. In ROBOTECH, there are no toys being marketed. There are some imported toys that have come in, but the toy line has not been set to coincide with the release of the ROBOTECH television program so, without all that back-up, the series itself is doing remarkably well.

SHEL: *I am sure it will happen in a more natural way where the popularity of the show will create a demand for the toys and then the toys will be done.*

CARL: That is true. In Los Angeles without any ancillary support, it is the number one rated show in its time slot and that beats most of the competitive network and non-network programs, with the exception of the ABC NIGHTLY NEWS in its time-slot. And ROBOTECH is increasing its viewership.

SHEL: For those of our readers who haven't seen it, can you give me an idea of what the series is about?

CARL: ROBOTECH is a story of the future — how people relate to alien technology initially. It is protracted over an 85 episode cycle which relates to approximately 45 Earth years. So we have three generations of people dealing with problems that will eventually determine whether or not the Earth is destroyed and whether mankind ceases to exist. It has got some fairly significant science fiction elements. It's got a lot of dramatic situations, a lot of romance, a lot of humor. It is not a typical animated television series. It is most equivalent to something like DALLAS in outer space. People have also called it **James Michner** in outer space. Someone from the HERALD EXAMINER who did a review called it "GASOLINE ALLEY in outer space." It has an appeal which goes beyond your standard half-hour television show — which sets up a situation, has a crisis and a resolution of it all in one episode. Our show doesn't



Armoured Cyclone and Rider

As illustrated here, the Cyclone can convert into a powerful suit of Armour. The Weapon Systems used in this transformed mode are quite varied.

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"It's equivalent to DALLAS in outer space."

do that — it is more like a continuing comic strip, where every episode there's something new. Not every show has action or serious drama. A lot of it is character development, explanation and what-have-you.

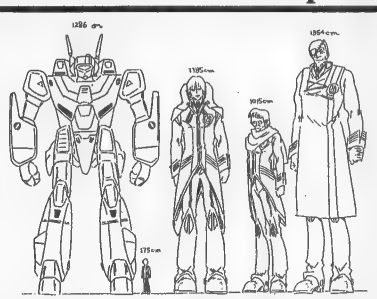
SHEL: *It must reach all ages, because I have a friend who is in his mid-twenties and he loves the show. His little boy of three is absolutely crazy about it. They watch it as father and son. They enjoy watching the same thing.*

CARL: We kept the spirit that the Japanese had — and that is the most important aspect — it is so enthusiastic and so positive. We didn't emasculate what the Japanese did, we enhanced it. The Japanese are masters of telling stories. We allowed the spirit to come through the Western approach, and it is appealing to a large group of people. It is a universal show.

SHEL: *Tell me what some of the problems were and continue to be in combining three different television series to make this one.*

CARL: The biggest problem is trying to find continuity that you can pull from the existing images. It is difficult but not impossible. I viewed each series at least a dozen times to discover what things would make sense. I did it without the aid of Japanese translation. I watched it silent — like silent movies. I would make notes of the images that seemed dissimiliar and hit upon the whole concept of proto-culture, which is an alien technology generated from plants and is an energy source that is the equivalent of organic fusion — very weird stuff. The use of this proto-culture concept allowed me to tie-in all the three series and is virtually seamless. If you are not a nit-picker, it makes a great deal of sense. Our ultimate plan, because of the success of ROBOTECH, is to go back to the original Tatsunoko Studio and commission all brand-new stuff, based on filled-in continuity gaps in the original plotline of ROBOTECH. We would hopefully end up with 260 episodes, which amounts to one episode per day for an entire year on a Monday through Friday basis, and which is totally novel and new. There has never been anything like this on television for children and once kids are aware of it, they watch it. It is multi-level, the texture of it and the writing is so good, that kids can get into it and watch it again and again. The writers are wonderful. Guys that wrote BONANAZA episodes, guys that wrote for **Red Skelton**, guys that wrote novels, science fiction. All sorts of people are writing these scripts. It is not your typical cartoon writing. It is intense, dramatic writing or science fiction.

SHEL: *Have any of the original Japanese writers or artists viewed your version and commented upon it?*



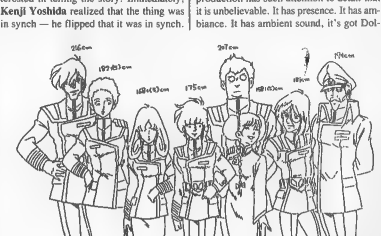
CARL: Recently, **Kenji Yoshida**, one of the principal owners of Tatsunoko Studios and one of the producers for the three series that turned into ROBOTECH, was in Los Angeles, viewed what we were doing, and was amazed. For one thing, the Japanese do not have synch. Which means that they never have their actors speak in synch with the mouth movements of the animation.

SHEL: *That doesn't bother them?*

CARL: They don't care. They are more interested in telling the story. Immediately, **Kenji Yoshida** realized that the thing was in synch — he flipped that it was in synch. We have enhanced their sound-effects nearly 2000% — we have 20 times the sound effects that they have done.

SHEL: *I was very impressed when it was explained to me that there is even a sound effect for an empty room — that they put a microphone in an empty room which has a particular sound to it, and then add that sound to two men at a table talking, so it sounds like they are in an empty room.*

CARL: If you listen to most cartoons, there is none of that attention to detail. Our production has such attention to detail that it is unbelievable. It has presence. It has ambiance. It has ambient sound, it's got Dol-



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"It is very adult. There is violence and romance. I'm not going to say sex."

by effects, it's got stuff that is reserved for future films. We are really trying to forge a new way to look at animation as a medium for television

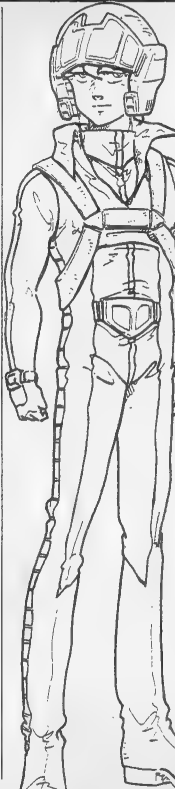
Yoshida, totally impressed with our production, eventually sat down and watched an episode. He doesn't speak English. Sat down, watched it, got into it, was totally enthralled, laughed, giggled, was excited, was scared. When it was over he turned around and said in Japanese to his translator, "This is better than what we did in Japan." He was flipped, totally flipped. The thing that is funny is that there is a group of fans of Japanese animated art in the United States, called "The Cartoon Fantasy Organization," and they get an equal amount of enjoyment out of something that they don't understand the language to. I found it to be an interesting contrast that when the Japanese guy watches his stuff in a foreign language he gets out of it more than what was initially in there for the Japanese, and when the Americans watch it in Japanese they get more out of it than when the Japanese watch it in Japanese. It is a cross cultural curiosity.

SHEL: *So we have an opportunity for international communication here. Do you sermonize at all in your scripts?*

CARL: I don't sermonize at all — I create "moral objectives." I don't sermonize like they do on HE-MAN, where they take two minutes out of the end of the show and say, "Now kids, don't drink and drive." "Always have your seatbelt on." We don't deal with that level of moralizing. What we do is create situations that have dramatic implications, and we allow the viewer to make his own judgement. We don't say something is good or bad. We might show someone being really nasty or show someone having a drinking problem, or show someone having a relationship problem. We don't explain the solutions. We let the characters with their own level of intelligence solve their problems or not solve their problems and allow the viewer to decide whether those solutions are the correct choices. It is very adult.

SHEL: *Let's center on that word. When I see the word "adult," that's another way of saying there is sex and violence in it. Is there much of that in ROBOTECH?*

CARL: There is violence and romance. I'm not going to say there is sex. There are interpersonal relationships centering on romance and centering on people's perceptions of sexuality — boyfriends, girlfriends, people get married and have babies. A lot of the dramatic implications that take place



in ROBOTECH deal with people trying to have serious relationships. "Am I ever going to get married?" You know, "I love this woman, but I love this other woman at the same time, how do I separate my feelings?" I have interracial relationships. There is a character named Roy Fokker who is in love with Claudia Grant, and Claudia Grant is black. Not only do they have a professional relationship, but they have a romance. There is interspecies romance. A human marries an alien and they have a child, which is very, very esoteric. But it is not obtuse and it is not above the heads of the viewers. They are into it. They write letters, they comment.

SHEL: *Do you ever get letters from viewers in the South about the interracial romance?*

CARL: Not really. We had to explain it, but once people see that we are not exceeding the broadcast standards and practices, everyone agrees that there is nothing wrong with it.

SHEL: *Maybe because it is a cartoon, the standards are not as strict*

CARL: Some people would say the opposite. Some people would say that — because it is a cartoon — the standards should be more strict. Our philosophy in producing this is if you show war produces violence and violence produces harm or death or injury, then it is much more realistic than a cartoon that portrays a character getting his tongue pulled out, and letting it roll back into his mouth and having his teeth turn into piano keys. That's unreal. ROBOTECH characters die. Characters get shot, they explode, they die. It has a realistic attitude about life and death, that transcends the medium of animation in the United States.

SHEL: *Carl, there are groups of parents who have come out actively against the violence in children's television. Do you feel that you have any responsibility in this area?*

CARL: Oh yeah. I mean, that was one of our major concerns at the time — we felt that because of the nature of the subject matter, violence being part of the series, we might have some problems with that. To test our work, we did a screening at an elementary school which went from grades one to six in Los Angeles. We screened two episodes of ROBOTECH and the principal of the school, a child psychologist, was herself totally overwhelmed and impressed. She said that, for once, producers of a television series created an atmosphere in which violence and war and the nature of survival was done realistically and with great sensi-

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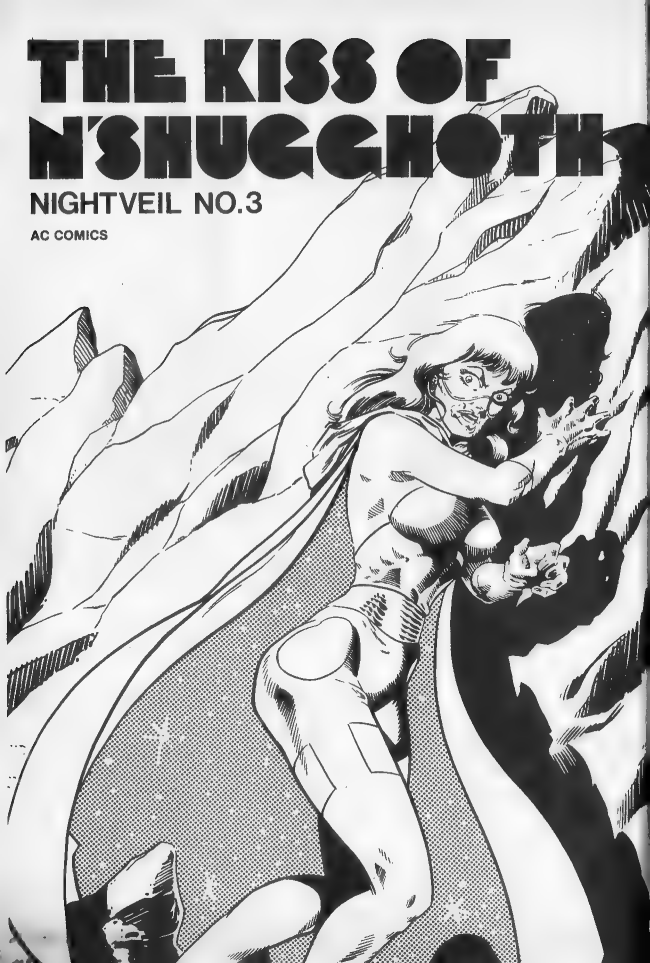


"In American, to see a cartoon character nude would be a cultural shock."

tivity, so that all the children could understand and perceive the nature of violence — such as, if you get into a war or a fight, you stand a chance of being hurt. Which is very honest and remarkable and which she thought was a very good idea.

SHEL: *What about nude buttocks and breasts, which in Japan are acceptable — did you have to edit them out for the American audiences?*

CARL: I don't have to edit them out. I do, because of my feeling that we've pushed the limit so far with what we are doing already. The Japanese don't produce nudity for prurient interests. They produce nudity in sequences where people are bathing. It is not sexual. It is merely a function of life. And as you know, bathing is a very significant factor of the Japanese culture. So it is not unusual to see people bathing. In American society, to see a cartoon character nude would be a cultural shock, and force people to just point at it and laugh. It would destroy the whole reason that it is there. So rather than have that situation occur, I eliminated and Westernized the concept so people don't misinterpret what is going on.

SHEL: *Also, these long zoom shots — I understand Japanese audiences tolerate them, but American audiences get bored as they take a long shot of the character, and then slowly come closer and closer and closer to get a close-up.*

CARL: My philosophy and television direction in general is to eliminate unnecessary longshots, because on television and especially in animation, longshots are virtually worthless — you don't really see anything. You can set up the scene with medium and close-up shots, which are more effective on television. So we have a standard philosophy of editing which tries to eliminate, whenever possible, unnecessary longshots. The Japanese do it as a standard of editing to make establishing shots, secondary key shots, and what have you — but we don't need that for cartoons, because we explain everything in the dialogue, which the Japanese don't. The Japanese have less dialogue, more visualization. We stress more dialogue, so that we can allow the close-up and medium shots to work better. It's very effective and even the Japanese have begun to recognize that, when they look at what we are doing.

SHEL: *Carl, do they have commercials on Japanese television?*

CARL: Oh yes.

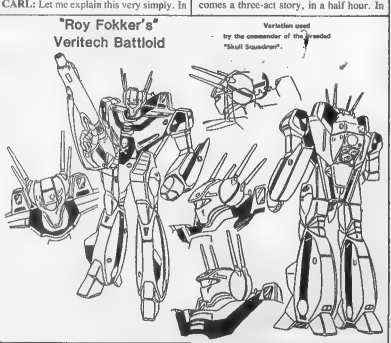
SHEL: *And are there natural commercial breaks?*

CARL: There are...

Rick Hunter and Captain Roy Fokker–from Comico's MACROSS 1.

SHEL: *Little cliffhangers... or do you have to put them in?*

CARL: Let me explain this very simply. In cartoons in the United States they generally have three commercial breaks, so it becomes a three-act story, in a half hour. In



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Japan, they break in the middle, so they have two acts. I kept that convention because it is better to tell a dramatic story in twelve minutes — break for a commercial and come back with the second twelve minutes of a half-hour show — than to go seven minutes, break; seven minutes, break; seven minutes, break. It is not aesthetically satisfying. It doesn't work. It doesn't allow you to develop dramatic storylines. So I kept the Japanese break points.

SHEL: *Did you explain this to the various local stations? Did you get any disagreement with that?*

CARL: I got a lot of flak, initially. And my point of view was: I am producing the show, and I am doing it a particular way. If you don't like that, you have editing devices and you can cut the show however you like. This is how I am presenting the show. You may reinterpret it any way you like. If you show it the way I am suggesting, here's all the set-up. If they don't like that, we send them an entire reel of bumpers and inserts so they can cut it anyway they want.

SHEL: *What's your typical workday like?*

CARL: The typical day at Harmony Gold begins at nine in the morning, when they start recording in a particular sound studio, and the recording will go from nine in the morning to two-thirty the following morning, so that would be a seventeen hour day. In between, I sit in a six-hour session where I edit episodes. I have to supervise the recordings of actors in four studios. I have to meet with licensors and various merchandisers of the properties to discuss aspects of the show. I have to review scripts. I have to re-write and re-edit scripts that don't work. I write all the narration and all of the off-camera dialogue to create continuity, because I have so many different writers. I have to supervise what's called the lay-back so I can make sure that every aspect of the show's been covered for final distribution. It is a very long day. Most people wouldn't put that kind of effort into it.

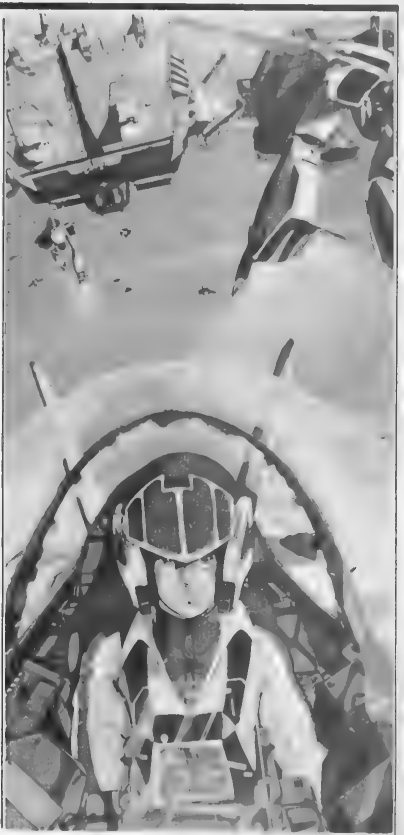
SHEL: *How many days a week?*

CARL: Six

SHEL: *Whew.*

CARL: Well, we had to produce five shows a week for 85 shows to get done in six months. It was almost an impossible schedule. It was like live television. It is very complicated. And then on top of that, I started to write the comic book for the series which Comico is publishing. The goal there was to get the comic book off on the right foot in terms of what I was attempting to get into the television show.

SHEL: *DC issued a comic called ROBOTECH DEFENDERS — was there any conflict with what Comico was doing, in terms of adapting MACROSS?*



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"It was only right to let Comico do what

CARL: There was no real conflict. It was a simple matter of understanding priorities. What Harmony Gold, Revell and all interested parties wanted was a comic book which reflected the television series which we were putting into syndication. The Comico plan was the most positive way to respond to the challenge of licensing a comics adaptation of a major new animated series due to be syndicated in continuity. Comico shifted gears and re-named their initial book and the characters in it to reflect the changes in ROBOTECH. They began to develop two new titles and the rest, as they say, is history.

SHEL: *How can you hope to write all the ROBOTECH comics, Carl?*

CARL: I never really intended to continue writing the comics for the full run. My intent was to start the concept off and allow Comico to get an understanding of what the basic storyline of ROBOTECH was about. When they were able to locate writers such as **Mike Baron** and the art staff, which includes the diversity of talent necessary to do justice to the characters, I felt it was only right to let Comico do what they are in business to do — and that is to produce comics. It is going to be interesting to see how others interpret my concepts. The storyline is rather complex and there are some continuity holes created by the crazy quilt methods in which I had to cut the entire series together but, in general, I am certain that Comico will keep the spirit of the original Japanese design intact and continue to explore the "soap-opera-ish" drama which is created in ROBOTECH.

SHEL: *How did the comic book come about?*

CARL: We are doing something totally unique with Comico, in two senses. It is the first time that an independent comic-book publishing company has been able to license a major property, which is very unique. And the continuity plan, too, is unique.

SHEL: *I understand that the Comico people were very excited. Did I read a press release where they are going weekly?*

CARL: We are going bi-weekly with three separate titles which are going to inter-lock the story. It is very complex. It is a very unique opportunity for Comico. The thing that is fascinating is that each issue of the comic book relates to an individual television episode. That again makes it unique, so that each comic pictorializes an episode of the television show. What the writer of the comic book has to do, is really take the script and translate it, and the comic-book artist takes a time coded videocassette, watches it and, in tandem, they break down each half-hour episode into a comic. The thing that is difficult is to find drama in episodes that are basically talking heads — because there *are* talking-heads shows. There's where the versatility of the comics medium and the artists who work on it have an ability to transcend the television series and make more of a graphic statement out of stuff. So Comico is doing a real good job. They are doing something that has never been done before. They are working on it very hard. I think they are doing something that is totally unique.

SHEL: *Carl, let's go back a little bit, and tell the readers what brought you to this point. When I met you, you were a clerk in a comic book store.*

CARL: I was *never* a clerk in a comic book store. I was an owner.

SHEL: *You worked for the American Comic Book Store in Westwood?*

CARL: No, I was a part-owner.

SHEL: *I understand that there's a lot that I don't know about you. I have seen you at conventions and you've worked in movies and films. You've written film articles, you are an expert on the* film noir genre. *Let me have your background. What were your interests as a youngster?*

CARL: Same as most children, I guess. Never really obsessed with anything, more than just knowledge — I was a very academic child. I was into academics and sports. I was a tennis player when I was going through high school and college. I was a very studious young man. Eventually, after going through college, I became a librarian. I was a college librarian, and I was the curator of the Archive of Popular Culture at California State University for several years.

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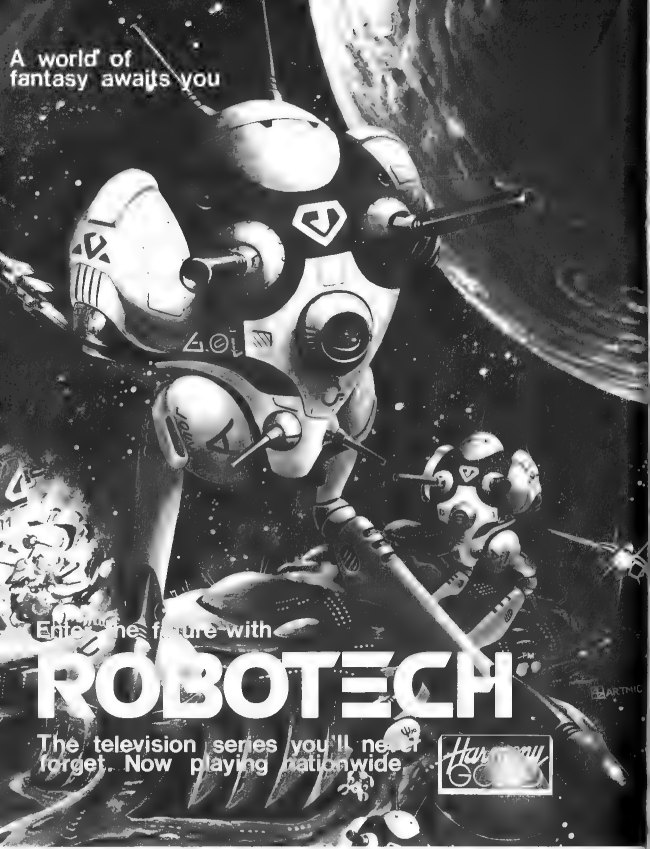
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they are in business to do — comics."

SHEL: *Was that your college?*

CARL: No, I was at about eight different colleges. I was at UCLA, USC, California State University at Irvine, I did a tour up in the Boston area, Cambridge, I was at MIT and Harvard briefly. I studied diverse courses. I had an Aristotelian education but my degree is in the Theory of Criticism in the Visual Media. I am the only person who has that degree in the United States. Did my graduate work in American Studies, learned the value of popular culture. I am basically a cultural anthropologist — which is how it works out when you study American popular culture. Because of the work I did in the library as an archivist, this huge selection of material that they had, I became very immersed in animation and comics. I was the West Coast editor of a short-lived publishing company called Atlas Comics, which published a bunch of super-hero and adventure comics and then did black-and-white magazines.

SHEL: *How did you meet David Alexander and* **Terry Stroud**?

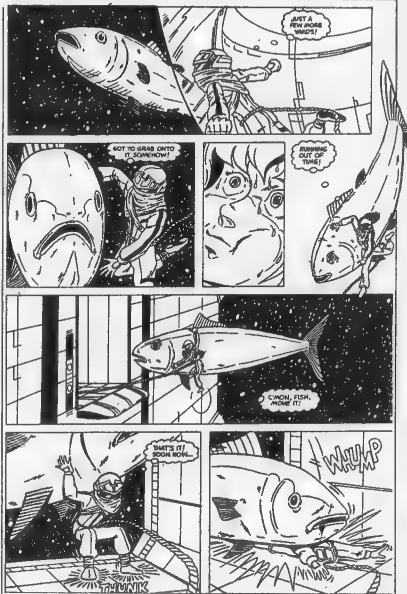
CARL: Terry was a student at California State University at the time I was working there. When **Governor Reagan** left and **Jerry Brown** became newly appointed to the governorship, my position at the school was blue pencilled because they thought it was not necessarily worthwhile. I had the opportunity to remain sort of as an aquisitions executive, but I decided to move on. At that time **Terry Stroud** was kind enough to offer me a position in his company which I accepted, and sort of moved through and became a minor partner in the American Comic Book Company. They were primarily a mail order business, and I created the American Comic Book Company's retail outlets all over Southern California. Then I eventually went into my own business, where I created comic art galleries, and in the meantime I wrote four or five books on film. I worked as a marketing and promotional co-ordinator for various film studios — worked at M-G-M, worked for **Dino DeLaurentiis**, worked for **Ivan Wrightman Productions.**

SHEL: *What did you do for DeLaurentiis?*

CARL: One of my closer friends in the industry is **Charlie Lippincott** who I met in 1976 — he used to work for **George Lucas** and eventually went to work for **DeLaurentiis** and eventually M-G-M, and Charlie always recognized that I had some germ of creativity in the back of my head and would hire me to do advance research on projects. I started working on a DUNE concept with **David Lynch** when they first selected him. Did some research for **Dino DeLaurentiis** when he was interested in some material for DR.STRANGE. I was like the library. I would create the bank of material and give it to them, and they would decide whether or not they wanted to make a film. I worked at M-G-M doing a very simple assessment of motion pictures. I would sit in a room and we would watch it and we would decide if it were acceptable for M-G-M to purchase or not. Then I was working as a marketing and promotional coordinator for Nelvana Animation up in Canada. And it was simply a matter trying to determine the inherent strengths and weaknesses of various properties and how to exploit them — using the word exploit in a good way — in various markets or areas I finally became really bored with doing that, because it is the concept of a creative mind trapped in a situation where the relative success of what you do is measured in the box office receipts, not really in the intelligent thinking. So I stopped doing this, and did not want to work in the motion picture industry — and then was approached by Harmony Gold to become their production executive for television. What that means is that I am the person in charge of doing all of their production and conceptualization.

SHEL: *Who owns Harmony Gold?*

CARL: Harmony Gold is an international company that is privately owned.



Art by Byers and Poston, from ROBOTECH: THE MACROSS SAGA 4.

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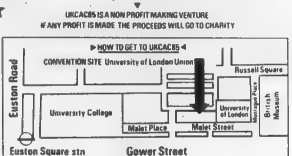

"I am producing a ROBOTECH feature film that will fall into continuity of the TV series."

SHEL: *You don't want to mention their names?*

CARL: It is really not germaine. It is a growing company very similar to, let's say, Lorimar. Harmony Gold is a privately owned corporation. It is very similiar to the DeLaurentiis situation. You have people that are independently producing films and we now have our own distribution company and our own syndication company — we're basically doing everything in-house to make sure that everything is done the way that we prefer it to be done.

SHEL: *As a scholar and a redesigner of other people's work, do you ever have the desire to create a character on your own from scratch?*

CARL: Oh yes. Believe me, when you see what we've done with ROBOTECH, it is all created from scratch. I would say that the personalities and the development is created from scratch, and the stories and the situations are created from scratch — so, in that sense, I am satisfying my need for creativity unlike, let's say, creating SUPERMAN the way **Siegel and Schuster** did.

SHEL: *You don't have a hidden desire to add a new character to the world?*

CARL: No. To my way of thinking the story is the thing, the development of drama. Whether I create a character like Indiana Jones — it's not important to me. The importance is to successfully convey the characteristics of your creation to the audience and get them into it. That's all I think entertainment is about — just to convey the situations and the personalities and make everyone believe. If people believe in your characters and what they are doing, then you are successful. That's my goal.

SHEL: *What can we expect of you in the future, Carl?*

CARL: At Harmony Gold, in the next year, we have undertaken the virtually impossible task of translating CAPTAIN HARLOCK into English. CAPTAIN HARLOCK was probably one of the most famous Japanese creations by a man named **Kenji Matsumoto**. He is responsible for creating GALAXY EXPRESS, SPACE CRUISER YAMATO, CAPTAIN HARLOCK, QUEEN MILLENIA, *et-cetera*. So Harmony Gold has set about the task of changing CAPTAIN HARLOCK into a syndicated television series. The difficulty again in doing this is that there are not sixty-five episodes of CAPTAIN HARLOCK — there are forty two — so we selected another Matsumoto series called QUEEN MILLENIA. We will interface the two into a single series called CAPTAIN HARLOCK AND THE QUEEN OF A THOUSAND YEARS, which will tell another science fiction story — once again in the spirit of the Japanese Matsumoto's creations as reinterpreted through Western eyes.

I am also right now becoming a film producer. I am producing a ROBOTECH feature film which will fall into the continuity of the ROBOTECH television series. I am involved in producing original animation and live-action. So Harmony Gold and I are taking it step by step. We're taking it as a family. It is a very unique situation. Everybody has a desire to work together with common goals, with no ego problems. We just move along on works that are aesthetically pleasing.

SHEL: *And as long as the public accepts it, as they are obviously accepting this, it looks like your future is pretty secure.*

CARL: I hope that people will like what we are doing — because we make the films for our audience, we don't make the films for ourselves.

SHEL: *Carl, are you a reader of COMICS INTERVIEW?*

CARL: Oh yes. What I like about COMICS INTERVIEW is that you do not maintain a basis in terms of the people that you talk to — you talk to people in the industry who produce the stuff on every level and that gives a broad overview of what the comics field is doing, in general. You do not just go for the people that are the most visible. You don't go for the peak response — you go for the meat-and-potatoes people who are really the heart and soul of comics. I think that is the important thing about COMICS INTERVIEW, as opposed to the other comics-related magazines which are all good in their own right, but none have the handle on reality in terms of the industry.

SHEL: *Well, the historian part of me likes working for this publication — I am one of the new Interviewers. Carl, thanks again for your time.*

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"I'm an existentialist, I'm an atheist."

CAT YRONWODE

I first heard of Cat Yronwode from the readers of her column "Fit to Print" in the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE, who mentioned her name when they ordered the EducComics books of mine that she plugged. Eventually, we met in San Diego and, since then, I have occasionally taken the bus from San Francisco up to Guerneville, on the Russian River, where Cat and Dean Mullaney run Eclipse Enterprises. I began this interview by asking Cat about the article on the decline of the "collegial atmosphere" in fandom which she wrote for CBG...

LEONARD RIFAS: *I liked the article you wrote for CBG regarding the collegial atmosphere a lot, but the golden age of underground comix that I remember happened when you were off living with goats or something. What do you remember as "the good old days"?*

CAT: I was in Marvel fandom in the early '60s. The people I knew then referred to "golden age" comics as the ones from the 1940s. Maybe we had only seen one or two copies of FLASH or something, but we all wanted to read each other's golden age comics. So that, to me, was the golden age of fandom, and I don't think that anyone who was in fandom at that time would disagree.

LEONARD: *I missed all of the Marvel fandom period.*

CAT: Fandom changed. I think that longtime fans — like **Don Rosa** and **Jerry Bails** — would agree with me that the introduction of the PRICE GUIDE changed fandom.

LEONARD: *Because people couldn't find things for a dime anymore...*

CAT: Yeah. It was *wealth* that let you have the comics after that, and not your desire to search them out.

LEONARD: *It seems that it's only been very recently that there's been more of the early stuff available, through reprinting.*

CAT: Yeah, people wrote in to THE BUYER'S GUIDE after I wrote that collegial at-

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Catherine Anna Manfredi Yronwode

Occupation: Editor-in-Chief, Eclipse Comics, freelance editorial writer for Kitchen Sink Press and Ken Pierce Books.

Born: 12 May 1947 — San Francisco

Residence: Guerneville, CA

Training: I was born with a critical mind.

Most Uncanny Mystical Experience: On December 16, 1967, I was in jail in Spokane, Washington, and made a vow that I would spend one year and one day looking for John Lennon — and I met him by accident on December 17, 1968.

Most Special Peeve: The Military-Industrial—Religious Complex.

"Everything is moving in a direction

mosphere article, and made the good point that old comics are harder to find than old films. The collegial atmosphere around film is more vital because of television, and because one can go to a college and see a film program, like I do every week. I just got to see some 1930s screwball comedies last weekend. If I had to *buy* those prints, obviously I. . .

LEONARD: *In the current issue of the EAST BAY EXPRESS there's an article about the guy who started the country's first repertory cinema. . .*

CAT: Oh really?

LEONARD: *. . .and It was in Berkeley.*

CAT: Well, see. OK, now there you go. See, I grew up in Berkeley. My parents and I went there all the time when I was a child. I grew up seeing those movies, and it was obviously a privileged experience. He also showed a lot of foreign films and my mother liked to go to them 'cause she speaks a number of different languages and likes to see foreign films, why not. I grew up to expect that kind of accessibility for historical things and things from other cultures. They were readily accessible to me in my youth through, like you said, the very first repertory cinema, and my parents ran an antiquarian bookstore, so all the books of the ages were available to me. And as far as music went, I guess I had that all too because my parents were collectors of records. . . My stepfather and I collected old jazz records and my mother collected old opera records. Repressings are so common now, that I can go out every weekend and buy repressings of **Bing Crosby** records that were previously unavailable, all beautifully remastered. But when I was a kid that was impossible, so we went out, every weekend, my mother, stepfather and I, scouting for books for the store and scouting for records for our collections. My mother was also a collector of cookbooks, and she established the University of California's incredible collection of California imprint cookbooks. She also wrote a bibliography of California cookbooks, so to me, again, the idea of collecting information, researching, having at your hand 400 California cookbooks printed before 1932 in your living room, of course! Every one had that kind of stuff in my circle. Obviously I demand a lot from the world. I demand that the world make all culture available to me, because if culture isn't available, then I just get totally depressed. It just becomes suicide time, because it's. . . I'm an existentialist, I'm an atheist, and as far as I'm concerned, there's nothing but a brief life span and then inevitable death, so if you can't preserve all these imprints of people's minds, what was the point anyway. You might as well kill yourself. . .

LEONARD: *Ah ha, so there how did you wind up concentrating on such an ephemeral medium, when you had all of western civilization as your heritage?*

CAT: Well, I guess I liked the printed pictures. I fancied myself an amateur artist. My father was a painter. I'm very near-sighted and have extremely bad eyesight and I can't draw representationally. I can draw little designs and I like drawing a lot, but I can't draw what I see and make it convincingly "natural," because what I see is apparently not what's really there. So I like to have drawings. I modelled for artists when I was a teenager. I like being in the art world. Comics were, I'll admit it, they were ephemeral, "kitschy" in my mother's worldview, and I have to admit, there was a part of me then that was rebelling against having all of the great opera singers of all time in my living room. I collected rock and roll records. My stepfather, who was into early blues and early jazz, maintained a fairly balanced attitude toward it, thinking that **Chuck Berry** was simply an extension of **Jelly Roll Morton**, and he was right in a

Story and art by Cat (from "Fit to Print"--TBG, 1980). First of a series in which Rabbit and Tree discussed life, death, and the possibility of an after-life.

THE NATURE OF REALITY
CHAPTER 1: THEORY
©1980 cat ⊕yronwode
TREE AND RABBIT ARE HAVING ANOTHER HEATED DEBATE ABOUT --
-- THE NATURE OF REALITY--
SO-CALLED!
THEY NEVER AGREE --
-- A BRIGHT HEAVEN OF VALUES --
PHAW!
-- BECAUSE TREE IS A NEO-PLATONIST--
-- AND THUS WE COME AT LAST TO THAT IDEAL (WHICH SOME CALL "DEITY" --THE TRUE UR-TREE!
YUK.
-- AND RABBIT TAKES THE EXISTENTIAL VIEW-- --THAT WE ARE, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, ALONE --BEREFT OF ANY ABSOLUTES!
NO!
MEANWHILE, EVENTS BREWING JUST OVER THE HORIZON ARE DESTINED TO SHATTER THESE NAIVE METAPHYSICAL SPECULATIONS -- FOREVER!

# of complete banality. Not just comics."

sense. I was considered in my family, I think, *declasse*. I considered low culture more vital. Maybe coming from a super-rarified Jewish intellectual background, I wanted something I could grab onto. Maybe I just wanted to fit in with my peers.

LEONARD: *I was about to ask if you had a peer group that shared your interests in these things.*

CAT: My childhood is one of those best described by reading early adventures of Spider-Man... without the superpowers. I was the book worm. The problem was I could never disguise myself as a normal person well enough. If I went in among my friends and said, "Oh wow, *(snap)* isn't that **Buddy Holly** *(snap)* record just the greatest ever?" They'd look at me askance and say, "Yeah, but I heard you talking about THE MILL ON THE FLOSS the other day. Why are you reading books like that?" I lived two lives for a long time. I would go to watch the old movies at night, and by day I would wear makeup and shave my legs and pretend that, if not a cheerleader, I was at least a Normal American Girl who wanted to go to the prom. For a while I even dated a boy who was in a hotrod club called the Torquemasters.

LEONARD: *The way I eventually resolved it in my own life was to understand that I had no hope of being normal, is that the same...?*

CAT: Yeah, well you see that's where science fiction came in. Science fiction certainly went a long way toward "saving" me. I read a book called SLAN by **A.E. Van Vogt** about all these telepathic people who had tentacles in their hair and... you've read the book or perhaps you haven't....

LEONARD: *I read about it...*

CAT: At the time there was a saying in science fiction fandom, "a fan is a slan." It kind of expressed everyone's feeling of alienation from their peers. The whole tradition of science fiction fandom, with its long distance friendships of people who never met, who communicated through fanzines and the mail, that kind of drew me in. Science fiction was the first thing that gave me the idea there were other people out there who formed a community, a mentality, which wasn't strictly the hierarchical culture which I'd been led to see from the perspective of a straight western European heritage. There was a middle ground composed of people who could come and go in society and partake of whatever they wanted, high culture, low culture....

LEONARD: *So, with the thinning of the collegial atmosphere thing you spoke of, are you finding fewer of these people now, or less...*

CAT: There probably never were that many

to begin with. I do find them, and its very funny when we meet, there's always a similar feeling of a meeting of the minds. One of us... wow! Here's someone new and we can talk about **Jack Kirby**, we can talk about politics, and whoever it is can tell me about whatever they're interested in too. For instance, I've got this little hang-up on 1930s plastic right now and 1930s dinnerware, and just a bunch of stuff like that, but I get just as much of a kick meeting someone who can tell me about Nicaragua, which you've been kind of informing me on. I rely on you to inform me on that. I don't know if you rely on me to tell you about plastic...

LEONARD: *You're the only person I know who is an expert on that.*

CAT: Yeah, but don't you feel that you'd like to know about everything?

LEONARD: *Yes.*

CAT: Well, that's right. So we all have to get together, and tell each other about *everything*. We have these common grounds. I mean, I wouldn't have met you except through comics, but we very rarely talk about comics now, and when we do it's as an adjunct to other strange offbeat subjects. We very rarely talk about what's happening in the X-MEN this week.

LEONARD: *I... I haven't read the X-MEN.*

CAT: That's why we don't talk about it. *(Laughter.)* But why don't you like those kinds of comics?

Not quite. MIRACLEMAN is the monicker at Eclipse.

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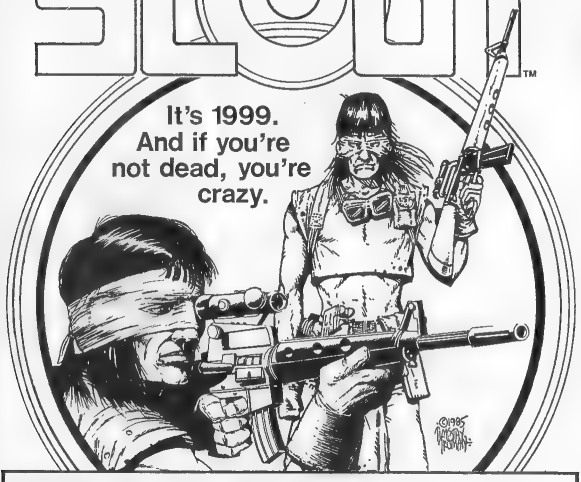

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"The Human Torch and the Thing meet the Beatles, omigod, do you remember that?"

1985 MCG

LEONARD: *Oh . . . I mean, I try to like them . . .*

CAT: Do you feel you *ought* to like them?

LEONARD: *I feel I ought to read them. How well can you anticipate, as an editor, what is going to move and what is not?*

CAT: Oh, I think everything is moving in a direction of complete banality, corruption, dissipation and grotesqueness. But that's not just comics. It's a mass cultural phenomenon.

LEONARD: *But is it moving in that direction in a way that you can anticipate and predict?*

CAT: Oh yeah. Up until it hits the wall, at which point Puritanism will rebound it. Comics derive their imagery from other facets of mass culture, usually. Most artists draw images that they pick up from skin mags, magazine ads, photo layouts in photo type magazines. They use them for reference. In both art and writing, most comics represent, unfortunately, a second generation type medium. Breakdancing was in for five minutes and two years later **Gerry Conway** creates a breakdancing character in JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA, God help us. That's so typical of comics. That's comics, they're always feeding off of something else. So in order to gauge where comics are going, all you have to do is keep abreast of popular culture as a whole and wait six months to a year. Comics *do* start trends sometimes, but it took Darth Vader to put Dr. Doom on the retina of every child in America.

LEONARD: *Why is the leadtime so long for comics to respond to these fads in popular culture?*

CAT: Most writers never put their finger right on the pulse of popular culture. They're waiting for LIFE magazine or some equivalent to tell them about it. Even those who are hip must face the long lead time in preparing a comic and getting editorial approval. You know, it comes down to this: Are we, are my peers and age cohorts, turning into those 40 year old comic book editors that I used to know were back there trying to popularize whatever I liked, but two years later. "The Human Torch and the Thing meet the Beatles," omigod, do you remember that?

LEONARD: *No.*

CAT: Oh Jesus! Oh, Christ! It was in a STRANGE TALES #30, it was so horrible! March, 1965, can you believe it. Their popularity was already up there. They weren't new anymore! That's when I realized **Stan Lee** wasn't the genius of the western world. That he was some 40 year old guy trying to keep on top of "today's youth culture." And it was when I realized that **Stan Lee** was just another bozo, writing fiction, putting books together, packaging comics, that I realized I could have *my* moment in popular culture. I could do whatever I wanted in popular culture. I didn't do it then, of course, but I saw that it was possible. I saw the mechanics of it.

HURRY, ALICIA, TAKE MY HAND! FOLLOW ME! WE DON'T WANT TO MISS A THING!
DID YOU TIP THE CABBIE, BEN?
HANDSOMELY! I GAVE 'IM MY AUTOGRAPH!
THIS IS SO EXCITING, DORRIE!
I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE THE BEATLES!

The Fab Four meet members of the Fantastic Four, circa 1965.

Jimmie Rodgers drawn by R Crumb from a set of trading cards available from Yazoo Records, 425 Waverly Place, NYC 10014.

1985 Yazoo Records Inc.

I also was convinced that I would do a better job, not as a writer, cause I don't write fiction, and I wouldn't ever presume to touch **Stan Lee** for that, he was *very* good, but I thought I could do a better job of not ending up in an office in New York talking about "cockamamie" this and "nutty" that the way Stan did and sort of showing an unhip, commercially manipulative persona, which he showed a lot toward the end. I thought I could do it and be sincere and honest and go out there and I could do for comics what **Jimmie Rodgers** did for country and western music.

LEONARD: *And so now that you're an editor, what do you find to be the main constraints on you in terms of putting out into the world just what you want to see created?*

CAT: The only constraint is — will people buy it.

LEONARD: *Yeah!*

CAT: I'm lucky. Dean and I are pretty well committed to doing this for fun as well as for money. I think if you interview Dean you'd get some of the same responses. We both grew-up appreciating popular culture as the silly putty of life. I would love to be able to put out every kind of comic I've ever liked. I would love to be able to put out funny animal comics. Not many people want to buy them right now, and I can't force them to. Right now they want the team-in-outer-space-with-one-guy-with-the-head-of-an-animal, and the team-of-teenaged-

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"Wow! We've got our own comic book company."

1985 Eclipse

mutants, and stuff like that. That's today's reality. We've picked up SUN-RUNNERS, and we get letters from teenagers thanking us for publishing it. "It's my favorite comic," they say. And others love DNAGENTS. Sure, I'd like to come out with an adult romance comic, a series about orphan kids, or a book featuring teddy bears. But it isn't a game, it's business, and I'm not going to mold the Eclipse line of comics in my image. I'm trying to give people what *they* want to buy, while not going against my own ethical feelings. The only limits are those imposed by distribution within the direct sales market and the willingness of people to break their brand loyalty habit to Marvel and DC. But we always keep a few experimental items out there for the public, trying to stretch the boundaries a little, while still making a profit for the company.

LEONARD: *You and Dean have both come to your present positions with a lot of background in popular culture. Also you have a lot of connection with the academic study of popular culture, for example, you are supplying Michigan State University with clippings related to comics and other things. Have you found much academic work about comics which is useful to you as an editor?*

CAT: You know, when you phrase it that way, it makes me think that perhaps you believe that Dean and I have a more intellectual bias than we do. We're in comics because we enjoy comics. For us the big kick is usually on Thursdays. The UPS guy delivers a couple of boxes of new comics and they're our comics. It's like a childhood thrill. It's so fun to get up in the morning and say, "Wow! We've got our own comic book company and we're going to put all these neat comics out." When things go wrong it gets very grim, because when things go wrong with the business, and I don't mean financially, I mean editorially, for instance, an artist is late, a writer turns in a less than satisfactory script, a colorist screws up and colors somebody's hair the wrong color through an entire issue, there is part of both of us that retreats to that same childlike, if not childish, standpoint and says, "Heck! I'm just going to go out and buy some **Simon and Kirby** love comics. After all, I got into this for pleasure and if there's no pleasure for me then the heck with producing our own comics! It was more fun buying them!" So we tend to have a very love-hate relationship with our work. Ninety percent of the time it's love, but oh that 10%!

LEONARD: *I've noticed.*

CAT: As far as our interest in research, that hasn't stopped. We do belong to APA-I. We index comics as our hobby. You can't say that about too many editors or publishers.

IT'S A DREAM OF SNOW AND OF FIREBALLS. A DREAM OF DEATH AND NUMBING VERTIGO...
...A DREAM OF FLYING
HE IS NOT ALONE. LIKE FIREBIRDS IN RED AND YELLOW, TWO OTHER FIGURES SOAR BESIDE HIM. HE CANNOT SEE THEIR FACES!
HIS POWER COURSES THROUGH HIS VEINS LIKE MOLTEN SILVER. HIS MUSCLES MOVE WITH PRECISE GRACE BENEATH HIS SKIN. HE KNOWS HE IS INVINCIBLE...

From MIRACLEMAN 1 by Alan Moore and Gary Leach.

We donate thousands of comics every year to MSU, not to mention fanzines, comic character t-shirts and buttons. We consciously preserve the makings of our comics. For instance, we have file envelopes filled with xeroxes of pencils before they're inked for every issue of AZTEC ACE. Also the plots, also the scripts, also the inked versions before corrections. I got into thinking that way after I met **Will Eisner**, who randomly saves things. Maybe I'm aiming towards at some point having Eclipse in some library, give fun to some future comics fan, the way **Eisner's** and **Caniff's** collections give pleasure to people who can see them at Ohio State University.

LEONARD: *You and I share a powerful feeling about the importance of libraries, but in my own case it gets tied in with the whole question of the possible nonexistence of the future.*

CAT: Oh yeah, well that's the whole problem. I call it "the Library of Alexandria paradigm."

LEONARD: *Oh! I'm still grieving over that!*

CAT: Yeah! Right! My god. My god!

LEONARD: *Edward Teller had this idea that we should build our libraries and art museums underground so the survivors would know why they survived.*

CAT: I don't know. Yeah, that's a real problem, and paper, as we were saying earlier, paper is the most ephemeral. Yeah. I think about that a lot, but if your personality is encoded in your brain and your brain dies, what happens to your personality. Well the best thing you can do is, through the imperfect means you have, encode parts of your thinking into paper, into magnetic tape, vinyl or shellacked grooved surfaces, create sculpture, and those things are what will be known of you, because surely by the time of your great-grandchildren,

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no one will remember what color your eyes were. But actually, I don't spend a lot of my time thinking about popular culture in the abstract or preserving comics in the abstract. Most of my time is spent engaged in putting out this month's new Eclipse comics. That's my work.

LEONARD: *I think the importance of the past, the reason people in underground comix became passionately interested in it, is because it helps artists gain a perspective for challenging and transcending the present.*

CAT: Yes, but you know, looking at it practically, it's probably more important for an editor, or a production staff person, or a publisher to understand the collegial atmosphere, than it is for any one artist or writer. It may increase any one artist or writer's ability to look forward, but in dealing editorially with a lot of people you'll find — at least I have found — that many of them don't lose sleep about what came before, what will come after.,

LEONARD: *I guess I have met a few sound sleepers.*

CAT: Sure. There's this months's job and this month's check. There are people who are capable of beautiful work who are willfully grinding out sausage, they are simply mechanically producing. They are renderers. They are writers. And an editor, to be good, should be someone who has an overview, a view of where individual writers and artists fit into the continuum of not only history, but present day comics, what their strengths and weaknesses are, what they can be relied upon to do.

LEONARD: *How does an editor put her or his professional knowledge of comics to work?*

CAT: An editor is an organizer, one who organizes individual plots, organizes the continuity of a story, character development and subplot development, organizes an entire line of comics for coherent artistic and literary standards of excellence. All of my background in research and popular culture is put in the service of new books — constantly. It's not only used to correct and criticize wayward writers and artists. It's needed often when editorially encouraging creators to do stories from their personal experience that are impassioned and involving to them, especially with writers and artists who have been in the business a long time. If you can give them some sort of touchstone to their own humanity, they'll turn out a better comic every time, than if they're told to do this month's variation on their standard themes. As a sidelight to this, I've found that the artists and writers who have worked for large, corporate comics publishers for the longest often show the least inclination to burst free. Their thought processes and art processes have been trained along certain lines, and when you offer them freedom, they don't always take it. On the other hand, some of them have taken the creative freedom offered by the independent publishers as a license to do grotesque work and what results occasionally goes beyond accepted public taste or morality, or even mass popular interest. This can become not only uncommercial, but actually bad comics. At Eclipse we work well with newcomers, as long as they meet the deadlines, because they haven't been conditioned by other publishers as to what is "acceptable", how many fight scenes to draw per issue or how to write the same plots over and over again. We also work well with established writers who realize that, while we offer them some freedom from editorial restrictions, they must, in order to sustain the book, produce something that is commercially accessible. Sometimes we get in arguments with them, they say they wanted to come to Eclipse because they think they won't be given such arbitrary rules as "no more than X words in a balloon." or . . .

LEONARD: *That's actually one of my favorite rules.*

CAT: Yeah, right, you know "no more interior monologues" — those types of rules, no green logos — whatever it may be. But we don't want them reinventing the wheel at our expense. We don't want them saying "Now I'm going to do a story that breaks *all the rules!*" — although a few of them have tried. Rule-breaking for its own sake isn't sufficient reason to produce a comic book, in my opinion.

LEONARD: *No, but it's the kind of thing that would appeal to someone who has been bound by rules for a long time.*

CAT: Yeah, yeah. Well see, we're in a delicate position here. We offer people creator's rights and that's the political lynchpin that holds Eclipse together. When the fight for creators' rights was very much in the fan press, it was well understood by fans and professionals alike that that's what Eclipse stands for. But now we're beginning to be approached by people who don't know that we allow them to retain their own copyrights. The fight for creators' rights ended for them by the inauguration of creators' royalties, which is different than creators' ownership of copyright. The royalty programs are now sufficient to intrigue certain people who would have left comics otherwise, but the idea of owning your own copyright is still a step beyond, and some creators still don't even know that's possible! I have to hammer it home to them: "You have a long life ahead of you, don't

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LEONARD: *We should get some Eclipse books out and talk about . . .*

DEAN MULLANEY: *(Enters.)* Did you mention how great I am yet?

CAT: No, I forgot.

DEAN: Forgot? Too bad!

CAT: The SABRE graphic novel by **Don McGregor** and **Paul Gulacy** was the first book that Dean published. This was before Dean and I got together. Then it got its own series which has come out, unfortunately on a rather irregular schedule. Don is very passionately committed to the book, but there are plenty of people in America who are sufficiently horrified by the idea of a black man and a white woman having sex, having babies, that this title has met with a lot of — um, anger. And we've actually had people at conventions come up to us and tell us to stop publishing it because it promotes "miscegenation." That's so screwed up, because what Don is showing is that Sabre and Melissa really love each other. Also, Summer and Deuces, the two gay guys, really love each other and really care for each other. What he's pointing out is that true, committed love is the highest value. In this series, anything that stands in the way of people's personal relationships is the evil that must be fought. However, that is hard to explain to a teenager who wants "evil" to be a guy in a tight suit with a desire to rule the world.

LEONARD: *Do you have any idea of the ethnic breakdown on who reads this book?*

CAT: A lot of black readers, because they write to us and mention their race — some self-proclaimed gay readers write to us about it, too. They want a voice of their own in comics, and they appreciate the fact that Deuces and Summer are a far sight from the Hulk being raped in the YMCA shower room. SABRE is a wordy book. It's complex. It's not for everybody. **Jose Ortiz** is now the artist. He's Spanish, so the whole book has a very European flavor to it in the art, which I like. The colorist is **Renee Reynolds**. Her idea of color is unique in comics, very beautiful.

LEONARD: *So this is the closest thing to a romance comic that Eclipse publishes?*

CAT: It's one of them. I would say that THE MASKED MAN is currently on a romance kick too. THE MASKED MAN is another atypical book. It's about a guy who has no superpowers — notice the fact that I have to qualify that, say "he's a guy with no superpowers," as if everybody else has them, right. Anyway, it's about a guy who puts on a mask and fights crime, but there is a strong romance subplot going on. It's also got a lot of crazy humor in it. It's a story that balances humor and deep emotion. You never know which way **B.C. Boyer**'s going to go. I hope people like it. I like it.

LEONARD: *What about CROSSFIRE?*

CAT: CROSSFIRE is similar to THE MASKED MAN in that, although the hero wears a costume, he has no superpowers, and the settings are naturalistic. CROSSFIRE started as an offshoot of the DNAGENTS. The DNAGENTS is far more popular than CROSSFIRE with buyers, but I think that anybody who reads CROSSFIRE ends up liking it as much, if not more than the DNAGENTS. **Mark Evanier** himself has admitted that he writes CROSSFIRE with more attention to detail. It's about Hollywood, it's about things that only **Evanier** knows, inside stories, and manages to be satiric without being a parodist, which is not common. It's hard to be satirical about people you know, and do it in such a way that you're not viciously tearing them down. I like CROSSFIRE better than DNAGENTS myself, but maybe because I have this hunger for behind the scenes Hollywood gossip. The books are really closely related. For instance, CROSSFIRE #8 co-stars Rainbow

CROSSFIRE–art by Dan Spiegle.

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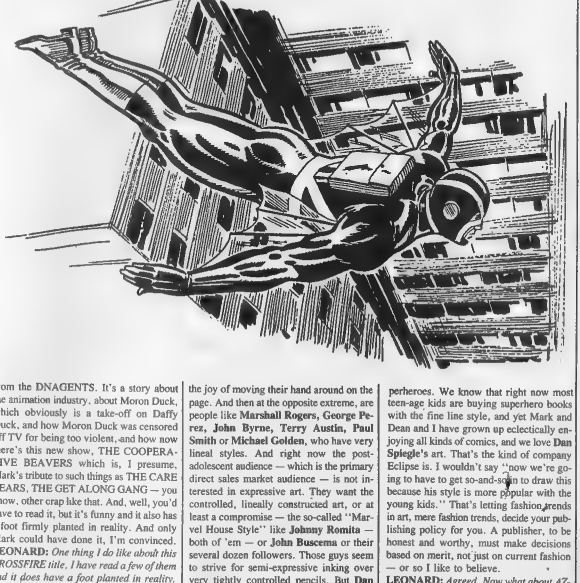


from the DNAGENTS. It's a story about the animation industry, about Moron Duck, which obviously is a take-off on Daffy Duck, and how Moron Duck was censored off TV for being too violent, and how now there's this new show, THE COOPERATIVE BEAVERS which is, I presume, Mark's tribute to such things as THE CARE BEARS, THE GET ALONG GANG — you know, other crap like that. And, well, you'd have to read it, but it's funny and it also has a foot firmly planted in reality. And only Mark could have done it, I'm convinced.

LEONARD: *One thing I do like about this CROSSFIRE title, I have read a few of them and it does have a foot planted in reality.*

CAT: I love CROSSFIRE. I think it's a great book, and, God, **Dan Spiegle's** art is so clean, and so precise. It's not the style that's popular now, cause it doesn't have that thin outline and that superslick mechanical look to it. It's more expressive. Trends in comic art always swing between two extremes — on one hand the expressive and on the other hand the linear, or architectural. I would put **Will Eisner, Caniff, Dan Spiegle**, a lot of guys in that expressive school. **Lee Elias, Frank Springer, Frank Robbins, Frank Miller** — all the guys named Frank (laughter) they're out there for the joy of moving their hand around on the page. And then at the opposite extreme, are people like **Marshall Rogers, George Perez, John Byrne, Terry Austin, Paul Smith** or **Michael Golden**, who have very lineal styles. And right now the post-adolescent audience — which is the primary direct sales market audience — is not interested in expressive art. They want the controlled, linearly constructed art, or at least a compromise — the so-called "Marvel House Style" like **Johnny Romita** — both of 'em — or **John Buscema** or their several dozen followers. Those guys seem to strive for semi-expressive inking over very tightly controlled pencils. But **Dan Spiegle** — he's expressive, all the way. He lets it flow.

LEONARD: *It vexes me that this is out of fashion. I know I don't keep up with the fashions so much, but Dan Spiegle's compositions on CROSSFIRE are so much clearer.*

CAT: Oh, he's a master, he's a master storyteller, my God. Now, in DNAGENTS the style is deliberately slanted much more towards the fine-line inking style, and this book is more popular with teen-aged readers. Obviously this is the art style that is associated in the public's mind with teen superheroes. We know that right now most teen-age kids are buying superhero books with the fine line style, and yet Mark and Dean and I have grown up eclectically enjoying all kinds of comics, and we love **Dan Spiegle's** art. That's the kind of company Eclipse is. I wouldn't say "now we're going to have to get so-and-so to draw this because his style is more popular with the young kids." That's letting fashion trends in art, mere fashion trends, decide your publishing policy for you. A publisher, to be honest and worthy, must make decisions based on merit, not just on current fashion — or so I like to believe.

LEONARD: *Agreed. Now what about AZTEC ACE? This is one that gives me some trouble. I can see there's a lot of work in it, but there's a* whole *lot of work in it. It seems like it really requires a large commitment to read this thing. Maybe I should rephrase that as a question.*

CAT: No, I think that was a good statement. I think that's true. We do get letters from people saying it's too dense, it's too hard to read. We also get letters from fans who enjoy that complexity and praise it highly. The bulk of the fans for AZTEC ACE are in their late 20's. It's popular. It doesn't sell as many copies as DNAGENTS but it is a

CAT YRONWODE

"Fine art has become the plaything of an

different kind of book. Sure, I would like it if it were a little more accessible, because, hey, then it would sell more. **Doug Moench** has said that upcoming issues will be more easily accessible, to the general reader, but I don't want him to change the character of what he's writing, which is poetic, florid, involuted. I mean, what can you say about a book in which the disembodied head of **Sigmund Freud** is wandering around commenting about everyone's neuroses while people are screwing in the rafters in **Galileo's** laboratory in 17th Century Venice. Let me tell you something which relates indirectly to AZTEC ACE. A friend of mine who is a comics professional, a woman I love dearly, hurt my feelings to the point that I almost burst into tears and ran out of the bar where we were sitting, by telling me that I was a "history nut." We were talking about GHOSTBUSTERS and I said that I would have rather read a good book about the Roosevelt administration in 1933 than seen GHOSTBUSTERS. And her reply was a dismissal of my opinion, a uniquely phrased dismissal of what I had meant as a criticism of the movie. As I recall, she said, "You're only saying that 'cause you're a history nut." I don't know whether she likes AZTEC ACE or not, but it's for the history nuts among us, who needed a comic book.

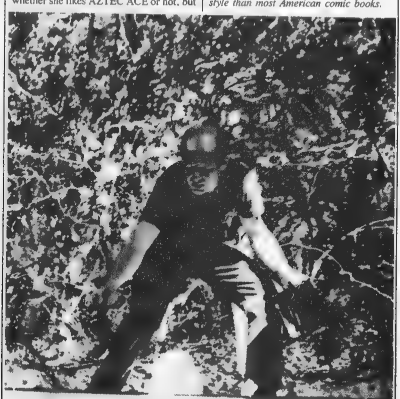
LEONARD: *Now we come to my favorite Eclipse book, which is ZOT! I wish it sold zillions of copies because I can open it up and look at it and it's so clear!*

CAT: I love Zot

LEONARD: *I mean it's not only clear, but the storytelling is really exciting.*

CAT: ZOT! is, to me, perfect cartooning. The story itself, the dialogue and the art are all in service of each other. I think it helps to have a writer-artist on the book. This book has a lot of love interest, a lot of character development beyond what's usually done in a comic. And, admirably, the character development is *all* done through balloons. It's not done through captions, and that, to me, is the sign of someone who is a good scriptwriter. There are very few plays or movies in which a narrator comes on stage and says, "He was thinking deeply of his ex-wife." No, that's not how it's done in theater, and it shouldn't have to be done that way in comics. Scott's captions are kept to a minimum and I admire that. If I could convince comic book writers to write 90% in balloons, I would do it.

LEONARD: *ZOT! has a more cartoony style than most American comic books.*



WAS JACKSON POLLOCK ANY GOOD?

CAT: Well, that's a big problem in the marketplace in America. Eclipse sometimes gets criticized by the self-appointed comics intelligentsia for producing books that are not different enough, "If you call yourself an independent, why aren't your books *really* different?" On the other hand, when we produce books that are too different, the general readers look at it and go, "but, this is a kid's book" or, "but this book is weird!" ZOT! has been falsely called a kid's book — it's certainly not a kid's book.

LEONARD: *But it's one of the books I'd feel most comfortable handing to a kid.*

CAT: Yes, that's true. Kids can understand it, partly because there are not a lot of captions. And it would probably be rated PG if it were a movie, I guess. What do you like about ZOT!?

LEONARD: *I love comics that aren't hard work to read — that you can open up and they tell a story that pulls you right into it, and you can follow along and tell what's going on — you become interested in what's going to happen next instead of wondering — what's going on here? I find the drawing very attractive.*

CAT: I think if ZOT! had been merely written by Scott and drawn by someone in the **John Byrne, George Perez** style it probably would be a bigger popular success than it is. This is unfortunate, and I'm not trying to put anyone down, but there are a lot of younger readers who feel that in graduating from childhood to adolescence they have to pay lip service to the idea that good art is complex art. That good art is highly rendered art. They won't even pick up ZOT! They would rather have a **George Perez** drawing with all of that tiny-tiny detail. I'm not singling out **Perez.** I like **Perez's** work, but it's a different style. Then later when these kids become adults and are secure that it's okay to like comics, they can go back to a simple, open style like Scott's and say, "This is all perfect," or they can go to a style like **Dan Spiegle's** — and still like **George Perez** too.

LEONARD: *That thing about kids showing their maturity by going for the heavily rendered stuff. That seemed to be one of the big problems that the underground comix sank into.*

CAT: Yes.

LEONARD: *It seems that the mainsteam comics are now sinking into that same hole.*

CAT: Yes, it ends up with rococo or baroque art. It's a pseudo-sophistication which in the end becomes mannerism. Now I'm *also* a sucker for rendering because I can't do it.

LEONARD: *Me neither.*

CAT: So I like it. **Terry Austin** inking **Marshall Rogers** was like a real mystical

inbred group of effete intellectual snobs."

1985 Tim Truman

experience for me. It was really eye opening that somebody would actually draw all that detail on one page. I don't think that it's the be-all and end-all, though. I like too many styles to become hung up on any one approach to art.

LEONARD: *NIGHT MUSIC — now that's a "rendered" book — but the subject matter is not extremely mainstream.*

CAT: NIGHT MUSIC is characteristic of the ideals that Eclipse is committed to. This is a three issue art book, as far as I'm concerned. Craig is one of the artists I admire most in the industry. In my own interior Jekyll and Hyde fights between high culture and low culture, sometimes I wonder why he bothers with comics. But I think he's suffering that same Jekyll and Hyde thing too. He really loves comics. He's obviously capable of "fine art" but he loves comics, and good for him.

LEONARD: *A short digression — do you follow the trends in high art?*

CAT: Oh God, do you want to get started on this? All right, in 25 words or less, **Cat Yronwode** says that since the split developed at the end of the 19th century between commercial art and fine art, fine art has become increasingly the plaything of an inbred group of effete intellectual snobs. At one point "fine art" degenerated into **Jackson Pollock** dribbles and people wrapping polyester around the landscape, and as far as I'm concerned, that stuff has no rightful place on earth, and that's why comics are better, a more viable form of art. Someone like **Craig Russell** is an artist who should be revered through history, along with half the other people we've just been mentioning. These cheapjack *poseurs*, who talk about "the struggle," and "suffering for their art" while they're melting plasticine over eggs and putting it up in galleries with nails stuck in it, should be taken out behind the barn and shot in the name of art.

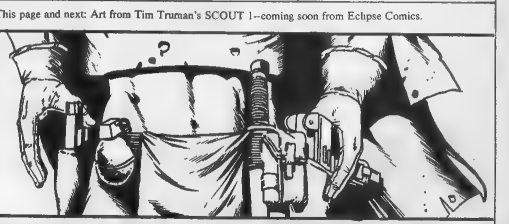
LEONARD: *Whoo!*

CAT: The last good artist in the fine arts world was — no, they're all commercial artists! I can't even think of the last good artist in the fine arts world! It would have to have been in the 19th Century. Every good artist since then has been a commercial artist. **N.C. Wyeth, Norman Rockwell, Franklin Booth, Howard Pyle, Maxfield Parrish** all those people were commercial artists! **Alphonse Mucha** was a commercial artist for the bulk of his career, until he did "The Slav Epic," when, thank God, he was free of having to draw those biscuit tins, you know. Commercial art is fine art, there is no fine art. Fine art is dead, Goddamn nonobjectivists, may they rot in hell!

LEONARD: *Well, but what about the people who have worked in a more representational way like Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, the regionalists, Diego Rivera?*

CAT: Okay. Okay. Even **Thomas Hart Benton**, what was he doing? He was illustrating books. Isn't that commercial art? He

This page and next: Art from Tim Truman's SCOUT 1--coming soon from Eclipse Comics.



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could have been a great comic book artist, a real expressive cartoonist! He did not lock himself in a garret and pursue a muse. He got a commission to do murals in the Missouri State Capital. And **Lynd Ward**! **James Montgomery Flagg**!

LEONARD: *So as long as we know what we're talking about when we say "commercial art," then we can go on to the next book.*

CAT: Okay. Anyway, **Craig Russell** is one of the greatest commercial artists of the 20th century.

LEONARD: *How about PRESSBUTTON?*

CAT: AXEL PRESSBUTTON reprints some material from a British magazine called WARRIOR. This is the first North American printing of the book. The lead feature is written by a man named **Pedro Henry**, which is a pseudonym. You heard it here first. In England they know it's a pseudonym, but I'm not supposed to tell whose pseudonym it is. However, if you look in the back of PRESSBUTTON #2 you'll see a list of names, and **Pedro Henry** is actually one of those other people. Anyway, LASER ERASER and PRESSBUTTON is your good old fashioned science-fiction romp. It's a good rousing adventure, but it's not the kind of thing you go to sleep and worry about.

LEONARD: *I worry about enough things, anyway.*

CAT: Fellow professionals rave about WARRIOR but the distribution in America has been very poor. Putting PRESSBUTTON into color and bringing it out in America makes me really happy. We'll soon be commissioning new work. We'll have run out of old PRESSBUTTON material by issue six, and by issue seven we'll be publishing new material. We'll be co-publishing that with Quality Comics, the British publisher. And we're picking up **Alan Moore's** MARVELMAN strip from Warrior too, which is utterly fantastic work. STRANGE DAYS is another British thing. A lot of people think we got that from WARRIOR and that it's a reprint, but it's not. STRANGE DAYS is all new material by **Peter Milligan, Brendan McCarthy and Brett Ewins.** One could say that the roots and the sensibility of their stories new wave fashion, rock music and the writings of **Philip K. Dick.** In the back of #1 they pay homage to their three greatest influences, **John Lennon, Philip K. Dick** and **Steve Ditko.** Now STRANGE DAYS sells best on the east and west coasts but the book that's really popular in the midwest is TWISTED TALES.

LEONARD: *Oh oh!*

CAT: They're all out there with chain saws, Leonard.

LEONARD: *So this is Ed Gein's territory.*

CAT: TWISTED TALES and ALIEN WORLDS we picked up from Pacific Comics. **Bruce Jones** and **April Campbell,** who edited them, are retiring from comics. They took the titles with them. We are basically cloning the books. We're putting out a book called ALIEN ENCOUNTERS and another one called TALES OF TERROR. The major difference will be, instead of having so many stories written by **Bruce Jones,** they'll be written by **Alan Moore, Charles Wagner, Buzz Dixon, Bill Pearson.** But we'll have the same artists — **Bo Hampton, Tom Yeates** — so we're going to carry on in the same tradition.

Hey, Leonard, we can't just talk about comics. You've got to ask me about my theory about editing or something.

LEONARD: *What's your theory?*

CAT: Well, my current theory is sort of a developmental one. I was a comics fan, then I got into writing about comics as a freelance writer. I became a comics critic, and finally I became an editor. So — obviously — I think that the same things that make a good critic make a good editor. An editor is a sort of pre-critic. I've also learned, in the years that I've been editing, about deadlines, about the exigencies of the guy who had the appendicitis, like Scott, and couldn't make the deadline. Or the guy whose wife left him and he didn't want to draw any more for a while. Or the guy whose girlfriend's dog got venereal disease and he didn't turn his script in on time . . .

LEONARD: *I never heard of that, is that true?*

CAT: Yes.

LEONARD: *Is this a recent phenomenon, venereal diseases among animals?*

CAT: No. Oh no, no, no, no. I have 19th century veterinarian books that talk about it. Gleet. Gleet is the name of the most common venereal disease among chickens.

LEONARD: *Well. My dogs never got those. I'm really lucky.*

CAT: There's even hamster gonorrhea Caused by a related —

LEONARD: *So! The theory of editing. I never heard about that.*

CAT: — bacteria. I wouldn't make something like that up, come on! Um, so I'm not always pleased with every book we put out because I'm a very severe critic. I haven't lost my critical sensibilities just because I'm editing. In fact, if anything I've become sharper due to the volume of material I see passing over my desk. I try not to edit too heavily, but I try to instead work with people whose work I like in the first place. I'm not a nonexistent editor like some I know. I like to discuss the comics through all stages of production. An editor shouldn't meddle. The best work an editor can do is find people who have the potential to produce really great comics, and press them to produce new comics. Act as their conscience and their sounding board along the way.

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BEAU SMITH

"We started COMICAST to bring out the

I never believed the interviews published in COMICS INTERVIEW... until it happened to me! There I was, in the plush offices of COMICAST: The Audio Fanzine. We are a radio fanzine. A presentation of comics news, interviews, reviews, and other off-the-wall comments that we hope will bring comics closer to the fan. COMICAST is designed to use the tools that radio uses best — immediacy and energy — to provide the service radio best provides — a spontaneous intimate package.

I had just come in from lifting some weights, running about 35 miles, getting a suntan and having my teeth polished (even though they don't need it). Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. When I opened it, I couldn't believe it — standing there was Beau'

Stephen Scott Beau Smith... letter writer extraordinaire, collector, super fan.

I just about passed out! I knew him from working with him over the last couple of years, but I didn't think he even knew I was alive. And now here he was, standing in my office... wearing nothing... but a ratty sweatshirt, stained blue jeans, and a pair of sneakers that smelled like anchovy.

Then he spoke: "Clint, I know you're something of a newsman... I thought you'd maybe like to... interview me."

Well, needless to say, we spent the next hour or so talking — about comics and various other topics. It was fantastic! We're gonna do it again... real soon!

As for me, I'll never doubt your interviews again! (By the way, for more info on COMICAST you can contact us at: 3009 Sansom Court, Milton, WV 25541.)

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Stephen Scott Beau Smith
Born: 17 December 1954 — Huntington, WV
Residence: Barboursville, WV
Occupation: Audio/Video Sales-Promotions & Columnist for Comicast. Wheeler-Dealer.
Hobbies: Comics, Guns, Knives, Boxing and old movies. (Menacing scowl down to a fine art.)
Favorite Movies: WAKE OF THE RED WITCH with John Wayne and IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE with Jimmy Stewart.
Pet Peeves: Trendy bandwagon jumpers and convention nuts.
Family: Wife-Nancy and son-Nick
Hero in Life: John Wayne
Favorite Comic Book Characters: Sub-Mariner, Ka-Zar, Wildcat and Roger Willis (from THOR comics).
Favorite Quote: "Greetings from the land of beatings," — The Badger.

CLINT McELROY: *Let's start off first of all with where you started. What's the first comic book you remember reading?*

STEPHEN SCOTT BEAU SMITH: Well, the first comic book I remember reading, actually reading, was an old issue of BATMAN from when they were still 10¢. I've got it in my office at home, on the wall. "Bat-Hound and the Creature" was the name of the story. That's the first one I remember actually reading. It was the night before I went into the first grade, and Mom and Dad had bought me a bunch of comic books 'cause, you know, I was kind of semi-nervous and stuff. I read it right before I went to bed — I knew pretty much how to read before I went to school, so it wasn't too bad. It was the weirdest thing. I remember reading the book, and I read it completely — I thought the story was just really, really good. I turned off the nightstand light, went to sleep, and it seemed like a matter of three seconds and I was up. It was morning and time to go to school. There was no night. That's the first one I actually remember reading.

The first comic book that I can actually remember having was SHOWCASE #4, the very first Flash story, which Dad read to me. That was where, I believe, the Flash was with the Turtle as the villain. That's the very first one I can remember.

CLINT: *Do you do that now with your son, Nick? Do you read him comics? He's how old?*

fun, the enjoyment of reading comics."

BEAU: He turned two in March.

CLINT: *Do you sit down with him and read comics?*

BEAU: It's mainly the kiddie books right now. I'll go to the comic book store once a week, and I'll order some from Westfield and stuff like that — I've tried some of the new Star Comics for him. Spider-Man and the Hulk are big favorites of his, so I have to get those. I don't actually read them, but I'll kind of explain in general what's going on. "Oh, here's the Hulk. He's beating Spider-Man's brains out. And here's Spider-Man. He's running for his life." Stuff like that.

CLINT: *Because I think the older a collector is, or a comic-book fan is, the more they find this happening — do you find yourself attaching certain memories to certain comic books that, you know, happened at certain points of your life, with certain things that happened in your life?*

BEAU: Oh, gosh, year. For me it would probably have to be DAREDEVIL. That is the only comic that I have the complete run of books. It started in what, '64? I've got the complete run — which I just completed the other day after trying to for years. I was in junior high — no, I was in elementary school, and I went with Dad to his grill on the East end of town. There was a drugstore right on the corner. Well, I went down there, and they had DAREDEVIL #15, where he fought the Ox. That was the first Marvel comic I'd bought in a long time. It got me hooked. I went back a week later, and, luckily, they had DAREDEVIL 15, 16, 17 and 18. They were there because they hadn't moved. They'd been on the rack for who knows how long. I started from right there collecting DAREDEVIL. To this day, when I think of Daredevil I think of **John Romita**. I think of DAREDEVIL #15 in **Nierman's** Drugstore and I probably would still buy the book regardless if it was the worst stuff on the market — just because of that. A lot of my comic books' collecting is for sentimental reasons. I don't speculate, you know. I'm not a speculator. I'm not a real stickler on condition or anything like that. It's a lot for sentiment.

CLINT: *Let's talk about one of your favorite topics — speculators. There are a lot of trends these days. Comic book collecting has changed a lot since you and I first started. Now, all of a sudden, it's a big business. It's got all of these publications, and all of these extra things, that it didn't used to have. How do you feel about the changes in the hobby along those lines?*

BEAU: Well, speculators, except when they are dealers, are scum. Well, not exactly scum. It's just . . . it's taken a lot of the fun out of the hobby. It really has. I've heard

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THE COMICS JOURNAL #100

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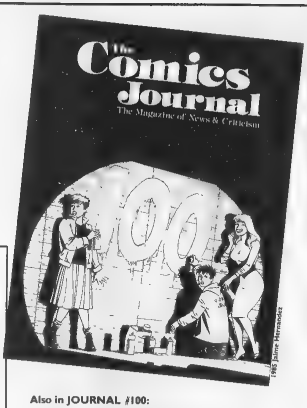
NEAL ADAMS on being a new publisher
MURRAY BOLTINOFF on deadlines
CHRIS CLAREMONT on life with the mutants
WILL EISNER on personal fiction
STEVE ENGLEHART on returning to comics
MIKE FRIEDRICH on the marketing of comic books
BILL GAINES on MAD today
STEVE GERBER on VOID INDIGO, G.I. JOE, and Marvel
DICK GIORDANO on running DC Comics
ARCHIE GOODWIN on Marvel's Epic Comics
JACK JACKSON on chronicling the history of Texas
HARVEY KURTZMAN on American humor
RICK MARSCHALL on the state of comic strips
DENNY O'NEIL on popular culture
GEORGE PEREZ on life after CRISIS
RICHARD & WENDY PINI on the elves and beyond
TRINA ROBBINS on wimmen's comix and kids' comics
MARSHALL ROGERS on CAP'N QUICK
DAVE SIM on Church and State and all those 300 issues
KENNETH SMITH on moral entertainment
JOE STATON on his return to DC and GREEN LANTERN
LEN WEIN on declining standards, and editing at DC Comics
AL WILLIAMSON on syndicates and inking SUPERMAN
MARV WOLFMAN on writing for a living
JOHN WORKMAN on HEAVY METAL and NATLAMP
BERNI WRIGHTSON on modern horror

COMING UP IN THE JOURNAL:

/101 — **FRANK MILLER** interview and cover! **SCOTT EDELMAN** on ethics
/102 — **HAL FOSTER** interview by **ARN SABA**! Illustrated article on **BASIL WOLVERTON**
/103 — **MICHAEL W. KALUTA** interview and cover!
/104 — **SKIP WILLIAMSON** interview and Snappy Sammy Smoot cover!



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★ **R. FIORE** gives his comic-book manifesto
★ **CARTER SCHOLZ** reviews **SHATTER** and **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES**
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"Don't be nasty. This is their life's work."

twelve-year-old kids talking about these things. "Well, I've got six copies of X-MEN #94, so I've really got something. If I can trade or sell this for this . . ." And it's mainly sell — they want to sell. They want to make money. They probably could not *tell* you diddly-shit about the story. It's ruining the hobby because it's taking the fun out of comic books.

CLINT: *This is one of the things — as long as we're talking about fun — that we have discussed when we're doing COMICAST. We try to have a certain atmosphere of fun, of having a good time, of trying to put that right back into the hobby itself.*

BEAU: I agree. That's the whole thing. It's like we were talking about when we started COMICAST — the fun was missing out. This is no slight against COMICS JOURNAL or anything like it, but they do tend to report on the downside. If it's not the downside then it would be something like foreign comics from Timbuktu, things of that nature. It's become a special interest fanzine. I wanted, as far as my input on COMICAST, to really bring out the fun parrt of it — the pure enjoyment of reading comic books.

CLINT: *We haven't ever really sat down and put anyting to paper, but would you say that we have a certain editorial stance at COMICAST? Or, would you say that putting the fun back into it is just kind of the attitude we take?*

BEAU: Exactly. It's more of a light-hearted pointed of view. It's trying to get back that same feeling we had when we were kids reading funny books. I know, you've told me many times about some of the best times of your life — just sitting around readin' a stack of funny books and having a good time. Mine, I've told you a million times, is sitting under the old tree with a Moon Pie and a bottle of RC Cola, reading the latest issue of AVENGERS.

CLINT: *That's probably the reason your teeth are so bad.* (Laughter.) *Let's talk about the show a little bit, for those who aren't famiar with it, the many — we don't have a humongous list of subscribers.*

BEAU: Right.

CLINT: *What goes into the program?*

BEAU: We usually try to have interviews with some of the pros and the people in the comic-book business, whether they be artists, writers, people behind the scenes, or whatever. We try to bring out not necessarily what's coming up next, what next project they will be working on, but how they feel about the comic books and some of their past experiences. I mean, I can think of a million times I'd have like to have heard **John Byrne** or **Walt Simonson** talking about what comic books were to them when they

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"Ron Frenz loves SPIDER-MAN dearly."

were kids. That's something that brings a personality to these people. It's closer to you. Also, you get to hear their voices, which is a lot more personal than just reading it on paper.

CLINT: *And we've really evolved. We're a lot better now. We have, now, wrapped up our fourth program, and we've changed from that first show. The first show was almost like a Marvel and a DC update on comics coming out. We've changed here each issue.*

BEAU: We've had to dump the news. We tried to give the news at first, and it was fine for the people that had already paid for it that we sent it out to that day. But to the people who bought it, say, a couple of weeks later when they'd either seen an advertisement or heard the word of mouth, it was old news. And I mean *old* news. We had to dump that, and hit on the personalities of the people themselves. We try to keep it from being dated, as far as with news and stuff, and just try to bring the personality side into it.

CLINT: *Mention some of the people who have been on the program.*

BEAU: Well, let's see, in the first one we had a real long talk with **Walt Simonson**. Walt had some great stuff. He told us about some of his childhood. He told us what he wanted to do with THOR, which brought out a lot of stuff and made it more interesting to me when I read THOR after that.

CLINT: *Walt Simonson, kid paleantologist.*

BEAU: Yes — the dinosaur king. Also, getting back to COMICAST, I've got "The Beauzone," which basically started out when we wanted to do a letter-to-the-editor type of thing. It's just my opinion on something, or just a general comic book related topic. The first couple of them were semi-light-hearted. There wasn't much seriousness to it — it was a kind of fun thing to do — something like you'd read in old MAD magazines. But, the one I've got coming up in COMICAST 4, I kind of "lash" out at the business, in a way, with my Beauzone Awards. **Mark Near**, who is our resident reviewer, does reviews on different comics.

Mark's real *forte* is the animation business; plus role-playing games and things like that. I'll be honest with you, there's very few people, I think, that know more about that kind of stuff than Mark. He is especially an animation buff. I've had to call him a couple of times at night with questions I have. "Mark, could you tell me about these old Flash and Superman cartoons?" He always has the answer and is always more than willing to give it.

CLINT: *Also, in #4, you've got the Byrne and Stern Show. I understand that coming up we've got an old buddy of ours, one of our good buddies in the industry, Ron Frenz. Tell us about the Ron Frenz interview.*

BEAU: Well, the thing about Ron is that when we're talking to him I could see myself in his place. Ron is still — he's a professional — he's in this to make money, you know, for a living — but the fan never left him. He still gets just as excited about SPIDER-MAN as he did, I'm sure, ten years ago when he was just reading it faithfully. He's still a collector, still a reader. He is a rare item in the comic book business — which I've found out especially in the last year in getting to meet a lot of people — a pro and a fan. He loves the business. To quote Ron, they will have to blow him off with dynamite to get him off that book. He loves SPIDER-MAN dearly.

It brought a renewed faith in me. I'd met a couple of pros, whose names I won't mention, who seemed very down on comics. "Yeah, I'm doing this for the money. I can hardly wait to become a real writer, to write a novel, a book — to do *something*." Ron is excited, and he wants to get the people who read SPIDER-MAN excited. You just can't help but be excited by that.

CLINT: *He still sometimes says, "I can't believe it! I'm drawing THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN!" It just really blows him away.*

BEAU: Exactly. He's been doing it for what, a few years — comics in general — and he's still taken away. You'd think he'd get somewhat jaded after awhile, but no sir. He gets excited. When you just meet people like that, in the business, and they're still excited about it — just like you are — the readers — it makes you both their book whether it's garbage or not. You know, you get excited about it 'cause it's just so nice to see.

CLINT: *As long as you mentioned it, let's talk about fandom. Like we said, fandom has changed quite a bit because you've got a lot of speculation and a lot like that. But you and I have talked before about the almost unbelievable camaraderie that exists amongst comic collectors and comics fans, and even most of the pros since a lot of them started out as fans — most of them did. There's still a lot of really warm feelings, a closeness that's really unusual that you don't know about until you get involved in it.*

BEAU: Comic collecting — what I like is it's a select group in a way. No matter what you do for a living, now matter what background you come from, when you meet another comic-book collector, someone else that shares your hobby — with comic book collecting there's a lot to share, you've got continuity buffs, art lovers, and so on —

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"I wrote a letter to SPIDER-MAN and

there's something to share, and there's always more than enough conversation to go around. I've talked to people I've met, like, at conventions, who I've thought, "Hey, this is the guy I used to plink on the back of the head in gym class," you know. But here I am talking to him. It's great. You find out what a really nice people are through comics. It's like an ice-breaker. And, there's so much that you have in common with them — you really feel like you've met a long-lost relative a lot of the times. Like when we met in college. You and another guy were talking about MASTER OF KUNG-FU, which was not one of my favorites. I was sitting there thinking, "These two nerds are here talking about this crummy kung-fu comic book." But I got to meet you through that, and it worked out pretty good. That's the whole thing...

CLINT; *Well, that's your opinion.* (Laughter.)

BEAU: Well, yes, that's my opinion. *(Laughter)* But that's the way it is; it breaks the ice. It helps you meet a lot of people. Hell, I'm glad I met you — you're an okay guy. You haven't abused any children or anything...

CLINT: *I owe you some money.* (Laughter.) *Talk about some of these nice people. Would you say that most of the people you've met through comic collecting have been nice people?*

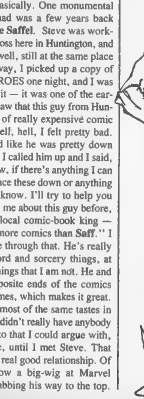
BEAU: Well, basically. One monumental meeting that I had was a few years back when I met **Steve Saffel**. Steve was working at the Red Cross here in Huntington, and I was working, well, still at the same place I am now. Anyway, I picked up a copy of AMAZING HEROES one night, and I was reading through it — it was one of the early issues — and saw that this guy from Huntington had a lot of really expensive comic books stolen. Well, hell, I felt pretty bad. This guy seemed like he was pretty down in the dumps. So I called him up and I said, "Look, you know, if there's anything I can do to help you trace these down or anything like that, let me know. I'll try to help you out." You'd told me about this guy before, that he was the local comic-book king — "Nobody's got more comics than **Saff**." I got to meet Steve through that. He's really into a lot of sword and sorcery things, at least he was — things that I am not. He and I come from opposite ends of the comics spectrum sometimes, which makes it great. You and I share most of the same tastes in a lot of comics. I didn't really have anybody that I could talk to that I could argue with, comic book-wise, until I met Steve. That blossomed into a real good relationship. Of course, he is now a big-wig at Marvel Comics, back-stabbing his way to the top. *(Laughter.)* Steve is a real nice guy. Prowise, I have met some super people. I'll be honest with you, some I've met in the last year-and-a-half have just, really, knocked me out.

CLINT: *Such as?*

BEAU: Well, **Ernie Colon** is one. The gentleman is a jewel, so to speak.

CLINT: *An amethyst.* (Laughter.)

BEAU: Exactly. *(Laughter.)* I met Ernie, so to speak, through letters. I'm a big letter writer. I wrote a lot of letters when he was the editor of FLASH, GREEN LANTERN, things like that. The thing about Ernie was he always wrote back. If he didn't print your letter and answer it there then he wrote back to you personally. It went on, and when my little boy was born I sent him a birth announcement. Ernie was nice enough to send one of the most beautiful letters we received. In fact, it's in Nick's baby book right now. Ernie was just an exceptionally nice guy. Not only is he a good artist and a good story teller, but he is just a real nice guy who goes out of his way to reach the fans. A lot of the times you don't see that. Some of the pros just do their stories and that's it — they don't show up at conventions and so on. Ernie goes out of his way.



Subby by Sienkiewicz.

CLINT: *You're also pretty tight with the folks at Westfield Comics.*

BEAU: Oh, yes. **Bruce** and **Sherril Ayres** from Westfield Comics — I'm not saying this just because they put COMICAST on their subscription lists — I met them through **Steve Saffel**, who hooked me up with the Westfield Subscription Service a long time ago — they are just phenomenal. They are two of the nicest people, honestly, that I can say I've ever met. Bruce is a comic buff. There's not too many people besides **Jerry Bails** and **Roy Thomas** that can compare with the knowledge that this guy has about the comic books and the comic-book business. Sherill is the type of lady that your mother always wanted you to marry. She is just really nice. I don't want to sound like I'm going crazy, but they're just very nice people.

CLINT: *You touched on letters a little bit. That's how you have come in contact with a lot of people in the business, and a lot of fans. Really, a successful letter writer has to put a lot of work into it. At the same time, the dividends are unbelievable. In just the few short years that you have been really serious about letter writing you've accomplished a lot. You've gotten back a lot of dividends, met a lot of people. It never ceases to amaze me the people you have met and have gotten to know more than just on a writing basis — people you have gotten to know personally. Talk about that a little bit.*

BEAU: Well, it all started back in '68. I wrote a letter to SPIDER-MAN and **Stan Lee** sent me a postcard back. That got me hooked. I said, well, you know, "There's somebody out there who actually reads these things after you've sent 'em." So I've been sending letters off and on through the years. Then IRON MAN #159 had the first letter I'd had printed in, gosh, probably twelve or thirteen years, and that really started it. I said, "Well you know, I'm gonna get back in this." I had some free time. What I would do, after I read a funny book, or a comic — call 'em whatever you want — I would write the letter right then and there while it was all fresh in my mind — while I had an opinion on it. I didn't write just to write. If I had an opinion, one way or another, pro or con, I wrote it. If I was indifferent, I just didn't write — and it started like that.

The first reply, probably, that I got was from **Tom DeFalco**. I had written him about a book, which I still have, of all the pros who are... well, the people who are now pros, when they were letter hacks, so to speak — and, gosh, there're probably 350 that I've got — of course, that's not all of

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Stan Lee sent me a postcard back."

Beau Smith and the Ball brothers — the comic-book censors.

them. They, at the time, were going to do a thing to be called THE MARVEL BLACKMAIL BOX; and he wanted me to send my info of all the Marvel letter hacks that were now working for Marvel — send their names and what comics they had letters printed in. They were going to do a book where they were going to embarrass them in public with this book. So I sent that to him. Nothing ever really became of it. They kind of made it into "The Post Office of the Past," which runs in the back of MARVEL TALES now. I think they reprinted **Jim Shooter**'s old letter, and a couple of others. It's mainly just been old letters from various people. I had an article printed in, I think, AMAZING HEROES #23 where it started the ball rolling. I had an index of this stuff.

Getting back on track, I've gotten to meet a super lot of people. **Murray Boltinoff** of DC Comics is a gentleman. He is like Ernie — if he doesn't reply to you in his letter column then he does personally. I have yet to send him a letter when I haven't received a reply. **Mike Baron** — a lot of Mike's was, I sure, in the early days, to promote NEXUS and THE BADGER when they first started out. Mike, again, saw that the root to this is to write to the fans, to talk to 'em. He did, and obviously it's worked because NEXUS is one of the biggest hits in the comics-book business. **Mike Baron** is another super nice guy. I got to meet him in Chicago this year at the Chicagocon. He's the kind of guy you like to sit around and have a beer with. There's been countless others. I've gotten to meet a lot of letter writers, now, that are still writing. I've met — well I've not met but I've talked to **T. M. Maple** on the phone. The only thing I can tell you about him is that he sounds roughly like he's right around my age — I'd say between 28 and 35, right around that age bracket. He's a very nice guy. And no doubt, he's got a comic book collection that would probably blow anyone's mind, I'm sure. **Mike Sopp** is another. **Dale Coe** from England is a very nice guy, very knowledgeable. He has a real knack about letter writing — a lot more, I'd say, than I. Most of these people I've spoken about write a hell of a lot better letter than I do.

CLINT: *But, you've got to have something going for you. Throw out some hints for people who want to get printed in letter columns. What should they do? What shouldn't they do?*

BEAU: Send free gifts to the people you're writing to. *(Laughter.)* I'm not joking. I've done that a couple of times. *But*, it's out of admiration and not as a bribe. The best thing, honestly, is that if you have something to say about the comic book then write down and send it. Send it whether it be good or bad. You know, you don't want to be nasty to them with, say, "Oh, this is crap!" This is their life work here. Give an honest criticism or an honest praise, whichever it may be, and sent it to them. Make it true feelings. Don't do it just to get printed. True feelings — a lot of the editors and writers that do the letter columns, I'm sure — can week a lot of things out. They know who's kissing their butts and who's not — who's just dealing them out crap and who's not. They can sift through this and find the people who really mean what they say. I would like to think that's why a lot of letters have been printed and why a lot of people have gotten back to me and why I've gotten to meet them. They believe what I've written.

CLINT: *Let's talk a little bit about fan communications with the pros. With the influx of the Independents and the other companies, do you see the comic companies maybe getting back to this — maybe getting to the point where they do realize that they've gotta have that input from their fans on a more one-to-one basis? Or, do you think that maybe they are getting away with it?*

BEAU: Well, it's become more business-like, let's put it that way. I see it going more like a union in a way. Unions are good as long as they are not taken to an extreme. It's the same way with press policy, and with fan policy with the pros. Sure, we've had a couple of quotes where libel suits have

"People buy becau[illegible]of peer pressure and hype."

come up and they want to try the case in court and not in the press. I agree with that 100% — that's right. Get the main headline stuff on that and print it, or record it, whatever, but don't try it in the press.

I honestly believe that the only way, the best way, to make sales for comics, to get the people reading, is to talk to the fans. That's the only way.

CLINT: *Let's have a little* deja vu *right here, alright. I'm gonna ask you the same question you got asked back in '65 when some smart-aleck came walking down the school aisle and kicked your books and a bunch of comic books fell out.* (Laughter.) *"Why are you still reading these funny books?"*

BEAU: Well, after I rearranged his teeth... Basically, they're fun. They make me feel good, so I read 'em. That's it. I do have a lot of complaints, though. Some of the comic books are getting too serious nowadays. The storylines are all too serious, you know — just completely downers, so to speak. But that's it — it's fun. That's the main reason I read 'em. I like the art. I like the stories. It's a good ten or fifteen minute read. I can sit down and really enjoy it.

CLINT: *Are you going to encourage Nick to read comic books?*

BEAU: Yeah. It's gonna be like sports. Mom and Dad never shoved them down my throat, but they never told me, "Oh, don't do it; you'll get hurt." If you want to do it, fine. If you don't want to do it, that's fine too. I'm gonna, you know, show them to him and explain...

He's already hooked, what am I talking about? I've already shoved Spider-Man and Space Ghost down his throat — those were the first words he could say. If he wants to, fine. If he doesn't want to, that's fine too. Daddy's gonna keep doin' it.

CLINT: *I happen to know that you are opinionated, pig-headed, stubborn — let's do a little word association here. I'm gonna throw out some words. You give me right off the top of your head, real quick, words that ring into mind.*

BEAU: Okay.

CLINT: *MARVEL SUPER-HEROES SECRET WARS.*

BEAU: Crap. The art was great, but characterization was lost, shot.

CLINT: *Frank Miller.*

BEAU: I had a lot of respect for **Frank Miller** when he started out with DAREDEVIL. I wasn't in love with it like everybody else was — too much ninja, I'm going to Japan, samurai and all that. He got too involved with that and he lost me — and I think he lost a lot of other readers with it.

CLINT: *X-MEN #94 for $90.*

BEAU: You can kiss my butt 'til it hurts. There is no way that this old boy is gonna pay that much money for a comic book. I find it ridiculous to spend that much money for a book, regardless of what it is.

CLINT: *BLUE DEVIL.*

BEAU: This is a fun book. It's sunshine in the summertime.

CLINT: *COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE.*

BEAU: I'm hooked, but yet I don't always agree. it's a great newspaper, and comic fandom needs something like this, but they plug themselves too much in the letter columns. "Well, if you would have had an ad with us then..." or "If you would have taken this..." — this makes me question their credibility. I know they're out there to make money. Sure, everybody is. But to keep harpin' on it — nah. I don't want to get like that.

CLINT: *Japanese animation.*

BEAU: *(Laughs maniacally.)* You can ship it right back. That stuff is not for me. I am not a big fan of samurai, kung-fu, sushi eating, Japanese animation.

CLINT: *SGT. ROCK.*

BEAU: Next to **John Wayne**, he's one of the best. I'm not joking — I don't say that sarcastically. I actually mean that. He is one of the best war/anti-war heroes. It's one of the best books on the market, and no one seems to realize it.

CLINT: *Bat-Mite.*

BEAU: You hit me on my sentiment again. I know when I see Bat-Mite in a story I'm supposed to think, "Oh, gosh a guy my age shouldn't be liking this," but I've always loved it. AMBUSH BUG is the BAT-MITE of today.

CLINT: *Favorite comic book.*

BEAU: Of all times? Favorite comic book? Well, there's no way I could separate that. I would have to say, as far as now, in this

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"Ambush Bug is the Bat-Mite of today."

day, it would probably have to be THE BADGER. In the past, favorite all-time comic book, it would have to be TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED with Space Ranger.

CLINT: *COMICAST.*

BEAU: You couldn't *give* me a copy of that. *(Laughter.)* A lot of fun, and I hope one day to be able to do it full time and leave the real world behind.

CLINT: *The Overstreet COMIC BOOK PRICE GUIDE.*

BEAU: The overpriced street guide, did you say? It's nice. You can buy one edition of it every five years and that's all you need. I do not go by it price-wise — I feel that I know what I should pay for a comic and what I shouldn't. It doesn't do me that much good, except for a catalog — you know, who, what artist, what things like that.

CLINT: *Clint McElroy.*

BEAU: The man who owes my wife so many child support checks for all of our little children that were never mine.

CLINT: *Lawyer.* (Laughter.)

BEAU: Naw. *Mac*, even with you sittin' here, you're a helluva guy, and it's good to have somebody to talk comics with. Other than that, I can't stand you.

CLINT: *Well, that's easily edited out anyway. Don Heck.*

BEAU: **Don Heck**, to me, is a man who has been shafted, has been screwed, has been abused by fandom and by the comic book business. I feel this way because I really think, and this is my honest opinion, **Don Heck** is one of the most underrated artists in the business today — along with **Dan Spiegle, Curt Swan,** and a few others too numerous to mention. **Georgia Tuska** is another. Don has some of the best artwork around. When they were going to do the Justice League/Avengers crossover, he is the man they should have doing it. I like **George Perez'** work, but he was picked, I think, because he's a fan favorite. **Don Heck** has worked on both books. He, to me, is THE AVENGERS. He and **Roy Thomas** are THE AVENGERS. If they had **John Byrne**, a fan favorite, writing **Don Heck** doing the penciling, on a Western, I guarantee it would be in the top ten comic sellers each month. His art is some of the best stuff that I've seen. Especially, give him a Western. Give him a romance book. Give him an Army book. Hell, give him a superhero book, which we've got ten thousands of. I guarantee, if you really look at his stuff you will see a true artist — and someone who can meet that deadline and still give you top-quality work.

CLINT: *This has been a message from the Don Heck For President Committee,* (laughter) *Stephen Scott Beau Smith, Treasurer. As a closing comment, let's take aim at one*

Beau and Clint (sitting) — the "Chip & Dale" of comics.

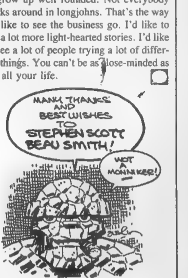
of your favorite subjects — people buying comic books that they don't really want to buy.

BEAU: Well, you can put that down in the pet peeve department. I, myself, quit that a few years back. I found myself buying comic books that I really just did not want. I really didn't like them, but I bought them because they were there. I felt, "Gosh, I've gotta have a complete run of this," or, "**John Byrne**'s doing this so I gotta have it," or, "**Will Eisner** has talked about this before, so I should get it." I found out that there's a lot of sacred cows in the comic book business and in fandom. You can't tell me that a lot of you out there, or you yourself, **Mac**, have not come across this. "I've gotta buy this RONIN #1 by **Frank Miller** because it's **Frank Miller**, and everyone, you know talks about him. He's imitating this Frog from France that, you know, is supposed to be so artsey-fartsey." Look, I bought the first issue, and that was the only issue I bought. It just wasn't for me.

You read these things because you enjoy them, not because of peer pressure. I've seen this so many times. I like **John Byrne**'s work, I like **Walt Simonson**'s work, but you're not going to find me going, "Here, sign my firstborn's forehead." That's dragging it too far. The comic-book business has become somewhat of a mini-Hollywood, and the people throwing fuel on the fire are the fans. Believe me, sometimes I think it's gotten to a ridiculous point. If you admire someone, if you like their work, say it — but you don't have to drool all over them either.

I think a lot of people buy things because of peer pressure and because of hype. The thing that I think most people should take from this, learn, is don't buy six copies of THE SECRET WARS. Don't buy eighteen-million copies of THOR #337. Buy that one copy, if you enjoy it. If you have a friend that didn't get it, sure, get him one. But the thing about it is that you'll save a lot of money. You can try a new book. Who knows, you might find another book that you will *really* enjoy. Rather than spending money for six copies of THE SECRET WARS buy just one, and you can also buy CROSSFIRE, SGT. ROCK, G.I. COMBAT, THE BADGER and stuff like that — something different. You may not like it, but you've only wasted money on that one issue. That's it, where before you wasted money on six or seven.

The main thing for a lot of people, like, I got back to my childhood. There were a million comic book companies when I first started. There was Tower, DC, Marvel, and before that there was Timely, Fawcett — a lot of others. That's the way I'd like to see the comic-book industry be again — the more the merrier. With fans buying just one copy of a comic and trying a lot of different titles — it's the only way we're going to get the business where we want it and get a variety of comic books. I'd like to see people picking up CASPER, ARCHIE, X-MEN, SGT. ROCK — a variety. You gotta grow up well rounded. Not everybody walks around in longjohns. That's the way I'd like to see the business go. I'd like to see a lot more light-hearted stories. I'd like to see a lot of people trying a lot of different things. You can't be as close-minded as me all your life.



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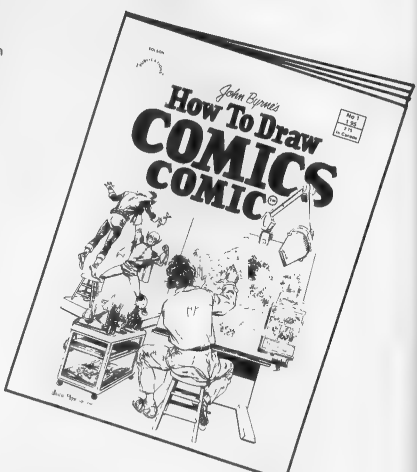

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SWEETNESS & LIGHT (OUCH!)

Dear David,

I just picked up the latest issue of COMICS INTERVIEW to read the interview with **Don & Maggie Thompson** and was so impressed that I just had to drop you a line to say what a fine job I think that you are doing with the magazine. Congratulations.

I was glad to see space given to the **Thompsons** because, first, you couldn't find two nicer people anywhere in fandom, and, second, they put in a lot of hard work and long hours to give fandom such a valuable paper as the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE and deserve recognition.

I had forgotten just how far back I'd known you until I was glancing through a copy of ALL DYNAMIC #4 (Feb. 1970) the other day and found a piece of your fiction inside. Boy, that seems like another century!

Keep up the fine work.

Alan L. Light
1115 33rd Street Court
Moline, IL 61265

Good to hear from you again, Alan — you're right, we do go back a long ways, and it does seem like another century!
—DAK

PORTRAIT OF AN EGO

Dear Mr. Kraft,

I was a little dismayed by your brushing aside of my letter in COMICS INTERVIEW #17, especially since we were basically saying the same thing. You said, "... the idea is to provide a place where comic fans and professionals can get to know one another

Don Thompson

Maggie Thompson

as people...", while I said, "I would rather have gotten a picture of **Jim Shooter** as an intelligent, perceptive human being than a portrait of an ego that walks like a companyman." Unless you were trying to get across the point that an ego that walks like a companyman is as human as **Mr. Shooter** gets, I feel that the interview failed to give us any kind of human perspective on him and failed to let us "get to know (**Jim Shooter**) as people."

I think this is a result of the interviewer, **Jim Salicrup**, who does work for **Mr. Shooter**, perhaps unconsciously pursuing his own interests in doing the interview. Maybe it was an extension of his job as editor of MARVEL AGE; that's certainly what it read like — a puff piece that has no place in a magazine that is trying to set up even meager lines of communication between fans and professionals. The interview with **Jim Shooter** wasn't communication, it was propaganda. A parallel is the interview with **Rick Marschall** conducted by THE COMICS JOURNAL some years ago. **Groth** and **Thompson** (I think they interviewed him) were obviously chummy with **Marschall**; the interview was one of the kindest that ever appeared in that magazine. They were so chummy that they chose to overlook **Marschall's** praise of **Father Coughlin**, a noted pro-fascist of the 1930s, and by not pursuing the reference failed to give us more insight into **Marschall** than the whole rest of the article provided. They were more interested in ingratiating themselves with **Marschall** than doing a serious, thoughtful interview. And I think that attitude also pervades this magazine (and to be frank, most other fanzines as well).

Finally, I agree that COMICS INTERVIEW isn't a news magazine; I never believed it was. But while it isn't 60 MINUTES, does it have to be THE JOE FRANKLIN SHOW?

George Ross
(no address given)

STOP TAKING MARVEL SERIOUSLY

Hey, Dave Kraft,

First, #19 was a great issue! Not only did you fulfill my desire for a **Don & Maggie Thompson** interview, but I had been wondering if you were ever going to get around to interviewing **Arn Saba**, and sure enough, there he is! All of my friends in comics fandom (you know who you are) also enjoy NEIL THE HORSE, and I enjoy it simply because **Saba** doesn't stick to the same formula issue after issue! He and his collaborators put out the best-looking black-and-white comic this side of LOVE & ROCKETS. My hat is off to Arn for the marvelous Neil!

As for **Don & Maggie Thompson**, it was fascinating to learn more about them. I've been giving the two of 'em hell lately, mostly about my usually late CBG delivery and their stance on Dot-Matrix printers (they prefer not to accept submissions prepared on that type of device), but I don't think I'd be so hard on them if COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE and COMICS COLLECTOR weren't two cornerstones of my comics-connected reading. I've threatened cancellation, but I just can't live without that thing in my mailbox every Friday, more or less.

Since last we spoke, I had mentioned that just because Marvel puts out several awful books, there is no need to condemn the company. Quess what. As a result of #17 and #18, I have decided to stop taking Marvel seriously. Your successive issue interviews with **Flo Steinberg** and **Carol Kalish** do indeed prove that the so-called Marvel Age of Comics is indeed dead. Back in the 1960s when Flo was at Marvel, those people like **Kirby, Ditko, Heck, Lee**, etc. had to work to achieve greatness — men who actually sweated over the books to get them out on the stands.

Today, as Carol rides herd over direct sales, depending on whom you talk to, Marvel is: 1.) either trying to create greatness with a minimum of effort (like buying prepackaged concepts) or, 2.) they merely have an illusion of greatness and self-glory and nobody can tell them they are wrong. (No slam intended on the creator of COMICS INTERVIEW, but witness **Jim Salicrup's** editorial, answering a reader's criticism of Marvel's hype in MARVEL AGE #28 — matter-of-factly illustrated with a cover repro for the first issue of SECRET WARS. Like trying to fix a leaky drain-pipe with acid.) If Marvel would stop trying to create another Spider-Man and printing those goddamn toy comics (I didn't hear about Marvel's latest abomination, SECTAURS, until two weeks before it shipped, and since it's written by **Bill Mantlo**, I won't even give Marvel the satisfaction of buying it.

Back in the 60s, fun was the key word at Marvel; they didn't care about money, they just did it 'cause "we love ya, baby." Keep in mind that the Merry Marvel Marching Society's $1.00 cost kept Marvel from profiting on the venture, (I am now sounding an open call for anyone with the MMMS records to make a cassette of it for me, by the way… now that I've read it, I'd like to *hear* it) — but once the Merry Marchers were in Marvel's grasp, then the more organized, "commercial" efforts like Marvelmania and FOOM came into vogue. Marvel proved with SECRET WARS that you can put rushed, haphazard bulldung on the market and people will buy it. I am staying away from SECRET WARS II, thank you. (The recent AMAZING HEROES cover that heralded it was undoubtedly the worst they have ever printed: if that's the highest pinnacle of artwork that **Sal Buscema** and **Steve Leialoha** are capable of, then SECRET WARS II is in big trouble going in.)

I like hearing about the people who are really trying to expand comics and what they can do. Thus, please engage the following interviews for the future:

Los Brothers Hernandez. All of them. At the same time (as I anxiously await MECHANICS).

Arn Saba. Whoops you already did him. Scratch **Arn Saba**.

Valentino.

Dan Mishkin and **Gary Cohn**, writers of the fabulous BLUE DEVIL and AMETHYST, two of my unabashed favorites. Speaking of, I wonder if **Ernie Colon** is going to work for Harvey again, since it appears that they're gearing up to start cranking out new books, judging from their CBG teasers. Some of his stuff on RICHIE RICH was outrageous and I enjoyed his interview in COMICS INTERVIEW #13 (despite other aspects of that issue which I'd rather not discuss at this late date). But I'd rather see him back drawing AMETHYST, wouldn't you?

And how about some animation interviews. I'd really like to see some talks with some of the grand old men of the craft. Particularly, **Chuck Jones** and **Friz Freleng**. Get that West Coast correspondent of yours Mark whatshisname, to round up some of these people — I'm told he knows *everybody*.

Well, now that you've got my letter, all you need now is one from **T.M. Maple** and **Amy Sacks** and you've got your next letters column. (Tee Hee.)

Dave Mackey
180 Whalespond Road
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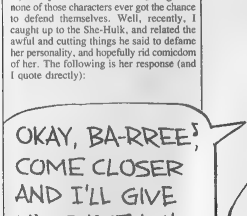
SHE-HULK HAS HER SAY

Dear Mr. Kraft.

I have been collecting comics for well over eight years and I have seen characters picked apart by people like (but not as bad as) **Barry Dutter**. The terrible thing is — none of those characters ever got the chance to defend themselves. Well, recently, I caught up to the She-Hulk, and related the awful and cutting things he said to defame her personality, and hopefully rid comicdom of her. The following is her response (and I quote directly):



T J. Tobolski
40 Bay Lane
Cheektowaga, NY 14225

THE LAST SHE-HULK LETTER?

Dear DAK.

I guess some people just cannot take a joke. The latest COMICS INTERVIEW contained three (relatively) unprovoked attacks against me regarding my campaign against a certain Marvel Comics heroine.

Sure, I admit that I was using the letters pages of COMICS INTERVIEW to promote my cause, but I was only doing it for laughs. Personally, I thought that some of my letters were pretty funny. Evidently, others do not feel this way.

All I was trying to do was help out my fellow Marvelites by eliminating a character who they are wrong in liking. And this is how they show their gratitude! You'd think they would appreciate all the work I've done for them over the years, but noo-oo-oo! Instead they just write in hate mail about me! These people fail to see that my work is for the good of Marvel and in the long run could only benefit society.

I have interviewed, for the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE, many Marvel professionals such as **Simonson**, **Mantlo**, and **Stern** — and I'm scheduled to do **Claremont** — but I will probably never do **John Byrne**. When I wrote to **Byrne** requesting an interview, he responded, "She-Hulk says I shouldn't talk to you!" Probably if I dropped my campaign against S.H., **Byrne** would grant me an interview. But this is something that I refuse to do. I will not sacrifice my principles.

Of course, we all know that the real reason **Byrne** put this certain heroine in the FANTASTIC FOUR in the first place is just as a personal vendetta against me. It seems the more I campaign against the Green Woman, the longer she stays around, just as theorized by **Darrel L. Boatz** in issue #19. It's frustrating but I'll never give it up!

No, Darrel — I do not love that Marvel heroine. I'd much rather see her replaced with **Thundra**. Tell **Dave Mackey** not to worry — this is my absolute last letter to COMICS INTERVIEW concerning a certain hulk-like woman. And finally, tell **Amy Sacks** that I hate to see her resort to petty name-calling. If anyone's gonna resort to petty name-calling it's gonna be me! No, but seriously, tell Amy that I still love her and I'll forgive her all those cruel things she said about me — if she issues a *formal apology!*

Barry Dutter
Comicville, USA

PS: If any COMICS INTERVIEW readers are interested in joining a certain committee against a certain character — well, you know where to reach me.

THOMPSON TAKES TO TASK

Dear DAK,

I was most interested in seeing COMICS INTERVIEW giving the dynamic duo of **Don & Maggie Thompson** the professional treatment in your 19th issue. They've made BUYER'S GUIDE a far more entertaining read than it was under founder **Alan**

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Light's lengthy stewardship with its cartoon strips, news and reviews. The only complaint I might voice to them is that the "Comics in Your Future" section needs to be updated more accurately and frequently.

On a more sour note (I'm sorry but this is something I have to publicly express), back in the late '70s I decided to take a flyer and publish a poster. It was full colour, printed on high quality stock and while it wasn't **Frazetta** it was one of **Frank Brunner's** better pieces, as many professional artists have told me. It was also limited to 1500 numbered prints and sold for the ridiculously low sum of $5 inclusive of postage. Now I will be the first one to admit to the world that in my naiveté I did a lot of things wrong in my handling of this item which I won't go into here. However, I did send the **Thompsons** a review copy of the poster along with a covering letter explaining if they might conceivably mention it in one of their "Beautiful Balloons" columns I'd be much appreciative. Suffice it to say, I heard nothing back from them and my little foray into the dark, dank world of the publishing game died a stillborn death. I'm not saying a brief plug (as they often give to items they enjoyed) would have caused the world to come running to my doorstep panting for a copy but it sure would have helped. As a result I lost a lot of money and my embryonic plans to do more prints and portfolios never came to fruition.

Fortunately, this singularly bad experience has not left me permanently embittered towards fandom at large. I though the **Thompsons**, though, being widely known for their supportiveness and generosity, would have given a struggling publisher a small boost, or the very least, an explanation for refusing to do so.

Gary Kimber
80 Searle Ave.
Downview, Ontario
CANADA M3H 4A5

Don't be too harsh in your assessment of Don & Maggie, Gary — it is possible, for example, that your package was lost in the mail and never reached them, at all. Of course, you surely realize that sending a complimentary copy of a publication to a reviewer does not in any way guarantee a review. In any event, a single review (or lack thereof) rarely makes or breaks a publishing project in the comics field. I am sympathetic to the difficulties of getting started as a publisher — which looks a lot easier to most people than it really is — but editing and reviewing is also demanding, particularly on a weekly schedule such as Don & Maggie must now keep for CBG, so a little understanding is in order. I'm sure they meant you no harm.

—DAK

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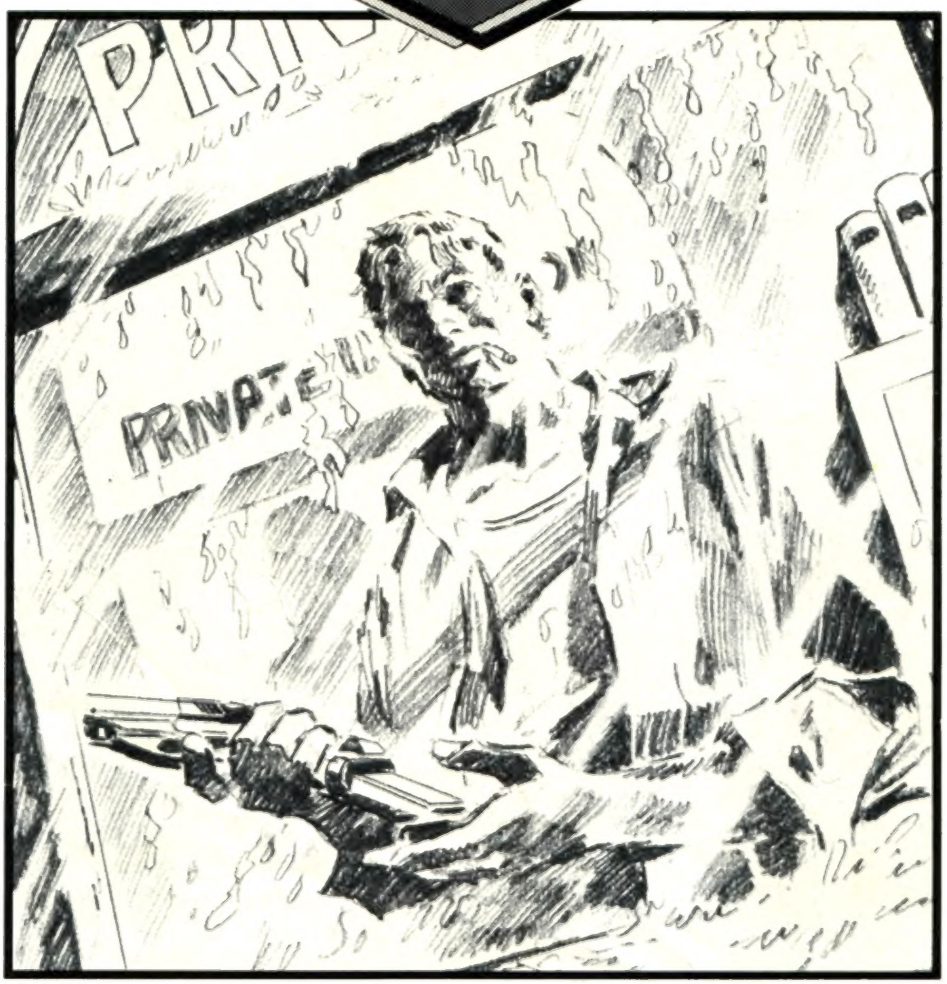

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